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OPINION METER

This week's poll:
Should top CNMI officials agree to a voluntary pay cut as a cost-cutting measure?

Let your voice be heard!
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142 DAYS without a government budget for FY 2009

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HK Life

Living on Saipan has changed me. I learned this as I traveled to Hong Kong for the first time.

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Stimulus Law

Racing to reverse the country's economic spiral, President Obama signed the mammoth stimulus package into law Tuesday.

BUSINESS...Page 13

Computer glitch hits PSS payroll

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

A computer glitch resulted in several employees of the Public School System getting withheld excess Chapter 7 funds last payday.

Sablan

Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan confirmed the incident yesterday, describing it as a minor computer glitch that happens sometimes.

"PSS already took care of the problem. It was a minor computer glitch that occurred in the processing within the system," she said.

Sablan said her office was immediately advised about the concern mo-

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GAO wage study delayed

50-cent minimum wage hike to push through this May

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

Under the stimulus package signed into law by President Obama yesterday, a report on the impact of the minimum wage increase in the CNMI and American Samoa has been pushed back one year to 2010, a move that disappointed the Fitial administration.

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Another Tinian investor rethinking casino plans

Only 13 submit comments to DHS

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

Another major Tinian investor, Neo Gold Wings Paradise, is rethinking its plans to build a $200 million to $500 million hotel/casino on the island due to the federalization of CNMI immigration and the exclusion of Chinese and Russian tourists from the visa waiver program by June 1.

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"Prudence…is now encouraging the

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IN LETTER TO INTERIOR'S NAPOLITANO

Review visa waiver program, put off federalization—Fitial

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

Gov. Benigno Fitial has formally asked newly appointed Department of Homeland Security officials to review the interim final rules for the joint Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver program and put off the start of federalization by 180 days.

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GREEN ENERGY HAIDEE V. EUGENIO

Board of Education chair Lucy Blanco-Maratita, left, leads dignitaries and students in the ribbon cutting ceremony for the $90,000 Skystream 3.7 wind turbine and solar panels at the Saipan Southern High School yesterday morning. The pilot "green energy" system, funded by Concorde Garment Manufacturing Co. and installed by Allied Pacific Environmental Consulting Inc., will power the school's science laboratory and wastewater system, back spin their electrical meter, and provide students with a natural science curriculum. ***See story on Page 6.***

Local

NMC hires Norita to do background checks

Ex-DPS chief paid $65 an hour

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

Northern Marianas College president Dr. Carmen Fernandez on Tuesday confirmed with a local activist group that the college has hired the services of former lawmaker and ex-Department of Public Safety commissioner Claudio K. Norita.

In a meeting with Taotao Tano and its president Gregorio Cruz Jr., Fernandez said that Norita is being paid $65 per hour to conduct and submit reports on his background check of candidates applying at NMC.

Citing Norita's hiring as necessary to come up with the most qualified individuals for the college, Fernandez said the same services are also being tapped by the Legislature.

Tuesday's meeting between Taotao Tano and Fernandez was a result of the group's request to access personnel documents, which included Norita's contract.

"[The president] confirmed that they have hired Mr. Norita on an hourly contractual basis at $65/hour to conduct background check on applicants. She said the legislative branch has also tapped Norita's services every now and then and that she recommended to the Executive Branch that it is important to have such background checks on who the government hires, especially in health facilities, public schools, and NMC," Cruz disclosed to *Saipan Tribune*.

"We want to make sure that the college fosters an environment that is safe and secure for everyone, most especially our students. To this end, it is not uncommon for other colleges to perform background checks to support the verification of credentials, criminal history, and other information related to employment decisions," Cruz quoted Fernandez as saying.

Satisfied with the justifications conveyed by Fernandez, the Taotao Tano leader said it was confirmed to the group that no one has been terminated at the campus and that her current staff and faculty "are all hard-working individuals who strive daily toward attaining high standards of education."

Cruz earlier asked the NMC management about employees who continuously get compensation or are being paid to stay home under administrative leave. Fernandez, however, refused to disclose any details on the matter, citing legal and confidentiality issues.

"She also acknowledged that some individuals may disagree with her hiring practices but she confirms that her methods are based on the best qualified applicants [and] that the board and NMC policy gives her the ultimate authority to hire whomever she feels is best qualified for any job opening," Cruz said of Fernandez, adding that NMC has hired six new locals to fill positions that had been long vacated.

Fernandez also stated that renewal and non-renewal of employment contracts are merely based on the evaluation and recommendation of the human resource office, which submits proposals to her office.

When asked about retaliation against employees who complain, Cruz quoted Fernandez as saying that "she is not the type of person who would do such a thing and that she has an open door policy for any employee, staff or faculty."

He also said that Fernandez assured him that she never denied anyone from speaking with any board members or anyone outside NMC but there are certain protocols in NMC policies that need to be followed.

Fernandez also acknowledged that there have been individuals who have been trying to discredit her dedication, achievements, and credentials, including her leadership at NMC and she hopes to see them and discuss matters with her personally.

For her, regaining full accreditation remains the foremost priority of the college at present.

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House puts off override on budget veto—again

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

The House of Representatives once against deferred a vote on overriding the governor's veto of the $156.76 million fiscal year 2009 budget bill.

Several members wanted to wait until others were present. Three members were absent during yesterday's session—Reps. David Apatang, Edward Salas and Joseph Reyes.

House Speaker Arnold Palacios during a break from the session said a vote would probably occur next week, at the latest.

Last Friday, the House deferred voting because only 17 of the 20 members were present. Fourteen votes are needed to override the governor's veto. The Senate overrode the veto last week.

Gov. Benigno Fitial vetoed the latest budget attempt because of a lack of austerity measures in the bill.

A few minutes after the House deferred action on the override last week, Rep. Victor B. Hocog introduced an administration-supported measure that reinstates austerity Fridays/unpaid holidays, cuts employer contribution to the Retirement Fund from 18 percent to 11 percent, and grants full reprogramming power to all expenditure authorities. Under House Bill 16-223, top officials including the governor, lieutenant governor, lawmakers, justices, and judges are encouraged to waive 10 percent of their salaries.

In December, Fitial vetoed the Legislature's first budget of $165 million, citing an $8 million drop in projected local revenue. The latest budget reduced the spending level by $8 million but did not include austerity measures like unpaid holidays. The House was unsuccessful in overriding that veto.

It has been 142 days since Oct. 1, 2008, when the fiscal year 2009 budget was supposed to be in place.

Legislature OKs pay increase for Rota, Tinian dep't heads

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

The House of Representatives passed a bill yesterday raising the ceiling salary for Rota and Tinian resident department heads to $45,000 from $36,000.

Of the 15 members present, Rep. Tina Sablan was the only member to vote no. Reps. Heinz Hofschneider, Ed Salas, Joe Reyes, Dave Apatang and Joseph Deleon Guerrero were absent.

"How could we in good conscience act on this bill when we have yet to act on the budget, austerity measures are pending in committee, furloughs are being threatened, and civil service employees haven't had a merit increase in over a decade is just beyond me," Sablan said after the passage.

Sablan noted that Gov. Benigno Fitial listed the resident director salary of $45,000 as one of his reasons for vetoing the Legislature's first attempt at a budget.

"Which is why we removed that provision in the first place in the subsequent budget bill that passed," she added.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Joseph M. Mendiola and passed in the Senate last month, states that salaries for Rota and Tinian department heads were disproportionately adjusted when previous laws increased the salaries of judges, attorney general and other government appointees.

Federalization impact on Tinian to be tackled

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The impact of a federal immigration system on the Tinian gaming industry and the exclusion of Chinese and Russian tourists from the visa waiver program will be among the issues to be discussed by the Tinian Chamber of Commerce after the election of its officers on Friday.

Tinian's gaming industry relies heavily on Chinese tourists, who will be required to secure a U.S. visa before entering the CNMI beginning June 1 unless the transition to a federal immigration system is delayed.

Don A. Farrell, last past president of the Tinian Chamber of Commerce, yesterday said when the supposed CNMI economic impact study was being done, no one took the time to even visit Tinian, as well as Rota.

"It seems as if the development of the casino industry on Tinian isn't even a consideration, when it could be producing millions of dollars in new revenues for the general fund," he told Saipan Tribune.

He added that they will also be discussing "how to communicate our concerns to the right people."

The Tinian Chamber of Commerce, which has been inactive since 2002, will have its election of 2009 officers on Friday, Feb. 20, starting at 10:30am in the Tinian Banquet Room of the Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino.

Farrell encourages all members to attend the Friday meeting.

Revival, agenda

After years of inactivity, members of the business group want to "rejuvenate" the Chamber, leading to the announcement of a meeting, he said.

Farrell said only member businesses that have paid the minimum one-month due of $10 will be eligible to vote in the election. He said regardless of the size of the business, only one vote is allowed for each federal tax identification number. Applications for membership will be available at the door.

"After the election of officers, we will be discussing how the new federal regulations and the change in Chinese and Russian visa waivers will affect the Tinian gaming industry," Farrell added.

Besides the election and federalization discussion, other items likely to be tackled are the "lingering problems with the installation of the instrument landing system, the airport fuel farm, and the dump relocation that have not been resolved," said Farrell.

Also on the agenda are updates on Chamber administrative issues, including taxes, business license, corporate registrar filings, new annual report filing and updating of signatures on bank accounts for new members, according to Philip Mendiola-Long of Bridge Investment Group and also a former president of the Tinian Chamber of Commerce.

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AGO pushes 5-yr. jail term, no parole for ex-CTC chair

'Public confidence demands stance against corruption'

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The Attorney General's Office wants James Michael P. Fitzgerald, the former chairman of the defunct Commonwealth Telecommunications Commission, to be put behind bars for five years without possibility of parole.

"Public confidence demands a stance be taken against corrupt public officials such as Mr. Fitzgerald," according to special assistant attorney general Joseph J. Przyuski of the AGO's White Collar Crime/Government Corruption Task Force.

Przyuski recommended to the Superior Court a sentence of 10 years in prison, all suspended except for five years, with no possibility for parole.

Fitzgerald was convicted of theft for stealing $88,202.92 from CTC by issuing unauthorized checks to himself.

The defendant signed a plea agreement with the government and pleaded guilty to five counts of theft in November 2008.

Under the plea agreement, the government agreed to dismiss with finality all remaining charges and will not argue for a term exceeding five years in prison. It was also agreed that Fitzgerald would pay back the government.

The sentencing was set for March 4, 2009 at 9am.

In the government's sentencing memorandum filed Tuesday, Przyuski pointed out that Fitzgerald deceived the public by stealing over $88,000 in public funds.

"In so doing he compromised the public's confidence in its government and government's officials. Defendant might not be the classic example of a machete-wielding violent criminal, but his actions are equally offensive and dangerous to our freedoms in a democratic society," Przyuski said.

The prosecutor said if the possibility for parole were not eliminated, a five-year unsuspended sentence could potentially be reduced to as little as 20 months in prison.

He also recommended that Fitzgerald be placed on supervised probation upon release from jail for the remaining five years of the suspended sentence.

Przyuski said the type of activity Fitzgerald engaged in helped earn the CNMI its recent "accolades" as one of the most corrupt jurisdictions per capita in the country, as reported in local newspapers.

The prosecutor pointed out that, despite the entry of his plea and acceptance of the record of the factual basis to support his guilty plea, Fitzgerald continues to deny responsibility for his crimes.

Przyuski cited the pre-sentence reported prepared by the Office of Adult Probation that mentioned defendant's continued excuses.

"This time, he claimed he wrote checks to himself to repay for expenses he paid personally to vendors because the vendors refused checks from CTC," he said.

When asked by a probation officer why he pleaded guilty if he did nothing wrong, the lawyer said, Fitzgerald blamed the government for misplacing exculpatory evidence when CTC was abolished and transitioned to the Public Utilities Commission.

"Where the trust and confidence is violated, our system of government is undermined. Nothing short of the maximum sentence allowable for each count will adequately punish defendant, send the proper deterrent message to potential offenders, and rebuild the public's confidence in the enforcement of its laws," he added.

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REVIEW

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In a letter to DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano, Fitial said he believes the visa waiver regulations deserve further review.

"We believe that substantial questions of law and policy are raised by these regulations and that they therefore qualify for reconsideration by the newly appointed officials of the Department under the Jan. 20, 2009 directive," Fitial wrote.

On Jan. 20, newly-sworn in President Barack Obama ordered a freeze on all proposed regulations not yet published in the Federal Register so they could undergo further review. The visa waiver rules, which left out China and Russia— two emerging tourism markets for the CNMI—were published Jan. 16.

If a delay in the implementation of Public Law 116-229 on June 1 is granted, it will allow newly appointed officials a chance to review two other regulations important to the Commonwealth—regulations regarding the CNMI foreign investor visa waiver program and the hiring of foreign workers during the transition period of the program.

"We look forward to working with DHS officials regarding these regulations before they are issued to the public for comment," Fitial said. "The department and the Commonwealth share a common interest in providing sufficient time for careful review of the regulations by all interested parties and in issuing the regulations sufficiently in advance of their effective date so that the necessary preparations can be made by government officials and the affected private concerns and individuals."

Another reason a delay is necessary, Fitial said, is because it will allow time for DHS to establish the necessary ports of entry.

"The Commonwealth supports an extension to ensure that its borders remain under the strict controls enforced by CNMI officials for the past few decades. Unless there is an extension, these officials will lose their authority on June 1, 2009, to deal with the entry of non-U.S. citizens into the CNMI under the preemption provision of the Act. The Commonwealth and its citizens deserve the assurances of the Department of Homeland Security that its assertion of authority beginning with the transition program's effective date will be adequately funded, suitably staffed by trained personnel, and supported by an appropriate software database to register all persons who enter and leave the Commonwealth," Fitial said.

If a delay is granted, he wants the new administration to consider hiring local CNMI immigration officers or other local residents.

"Our previous requests that CNMI immigration officers be given special consideration by the Department, as Congress expressly suggested, have not been given fair consideration by the department," Fitial said. "A large number of our immigration officials (37 of 68) who expressed interest in positions with the department and could provide years of experience with the local community, have been rejected solely as a matter of age. Surely this new Administration can take a second look at the disqualification of these applicants and find a way to consider them on their merits and experience, rather than on the fact that they are no longer 37 years old."

And, finally, the governor wrote, a delay will help prevent serious economic damage to the Commonwealth that will result from the loss of the Chinese and Russian tourism markets. DHS left the two countries out of the visa waiver program because of security concerns.

"An extension will provide time for the Department of Homeland Security to reexamine the extent to which the Commonwealth's current policies and procedures with respect to the China and Russian tourist markets do in fact present any security risk that needs immediate attention. Based on the Commonwealth's actual experience in dealing with these markets, there is no national security risk that argues against an extension of the effective date," he wrote.

DHS must decide and notify Congress of any delay to the start of federalization by May 2.

CNMI delegate Gregorio "Kilili" Sablan has also asked Napolitano for a 180-day delay.

ANOTHER

From Page 1

notion that perhaps it might not be wise to continue with our development plans," Neo Gold Wings Paradise chairman and president Hyun Myung told the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in connection with the regulations on the implementation of the federal immigration system in the CNMI.

Hyun is one of only 13 individuals and groups that have so far submitted comments on the interim final regulations on the establishment of U.S. ports of entry in the CNMI and the implementation of the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program.

He said he is not questioning the reasons behind the implementation of federal immigration regulations in the CNMI but he is "quite baffled by the lack of sensitivity" to its economic effect.

Neo Gold Wings Paradise's statement came three weeks after Bridge Investment Group LLC said it's re-evaluating its $40 million to $50 million casino and condominiums project on Tinian because of federalization. Construction at the project site has halted.

"The direct impact of these regulations on…Tinian…will be devastating," Phillip Mendiola-Long, executive vice president of Bridge Investment Group-CNMI, told DHS.

If the two casino investors pull out, Tinian stands to lose up to $550 million in investments.

'Not encouraging'

The Tinian Casino Gaming Control Commission earlier said placing CNMI immigration under federal control by June 1 will affect the operation of Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino and the business strategies of three other investors proposing to build a total of at least $540 million worth of casino resort projects.

Tinian's gaming industry relies heavily on Chinese tourists who will soon be required to secure a U.S. visa for entry into the CNMI.

"My company has thus far spent close to a million dollars just to position ourselves pursuant to the conditions of the casino license and other requirements in the CNMI. Prudence, however, is now encouraging the notion that perhaps it might not be wise to continue with our development plans," Hyun Myung said.

He said he had sincerely hoped that Neo Gold Wings, along with others pursuing similar developments, will play a major role in stimulating the CNMI economy back to life.

"However, that probability may dissolve into mere penumbra should policies continue to ignore the 'limited' economic resources available to the CNMI, which requires sensitivity and unique approach," he said.

He cited the following as major influences for investors to do business in the CNMI: The CNMI being a part of the United States; the CNMI as an approved destination to visit by the Chinese government; and the accelerating growth of affluence in China and its proximity to the CNMI.

The investor said that, unlike Guam, military plans for the CNMI are not definite and much of the land leased by the U.S. government in the CNMI for military purpose remains idle.

"Compounding the anxiety from the possible adverse economic effect of implementing federal immigration laws without considering the CNMI's unique social/economic position is the gravity of having no room to rearrange priorities and seek alternatives as a result of what might be in those reports," said Hyun.

Under the federalized system, Tinian will not only lose Chinese tourists but will also have difficulty hiring foreign workers, on top of the effects of the global economic crunch.

If nonresident workers are restricted from working in the CNMI after June 1, casino investors will face a huge challenge finding enough skilled and unskilled employees to staff the planned casino projects, the commission said.

13 comments so far

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security published the interim final regulations on Jan. 16, and comments are due on March 17.

But as of yesterday, only the following have posted comments on the DHS regulations online: Hyun Myung of Neo Gold Wings Paradise; Del Benson; Marianas Visitors Authority managing director Perry Tenorio; MVA board of directors; Patrick San Nicolas; Jack F. McClure of Pacific Subsea Saipan Inc.; the Tinian and Aguingan Municipal Council; S.G Stephanson; Oleg Valentine Tchernychenko of Belka Tours; Juanita M. Mendiola; Joseph T. Guerrero; Laurie Peterka of Practical Solutions; and Bridge Investment Group's Philip Mendiola-Long.

All the comments want a delay in the implementation of the transition to federal immigration system and/or include Chinese and Russian tourists from the visa waiver program.

"Please delay federal immigration until you have a program in place that accepts Russians and Chinese," businessman Del Benson said in his comment to DHS.

MVA managing director Perry Tenorio said the CNMI stands to lose $339 million in tourism revenue annually because of the exclusion of China and Russia from the visa waiver program.

In his comment to DHS, Tenorio asked for the delay of the transition period until additional security measures are in place and DHS has determined that visitors from China and Russia can participate in the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program.

Delegate Gregorio "Kilili" C. Sablan earlier write to Homeland Security secretary Janet Napolitano, asking her to delay by 180 days the implementation of federalization, but he said it will be best if Gov. Benigno R. Fitial asks for the delay.

The governor, who is now in Washington, D.C. said he will do so personally when he meets Napolitano in his official trip.

COMPUTER

From Page 1

ments after employees received their paychecks last Friday.

Affected PSS employees interviewed Monday expressed their disappointment after withdrawing their salaries from the bank.

"I was surprised because the amount was unexpected…that's why we need to find out what happened," an employee who refused to be identified told the *Saipan Tribune.*

Because Monday was a holiday, other affected personnel had no option but to wait until Tuesday to report and see what caused the deductions on their paychecks.

PSS has nearly a thousand personnel, both locally and federally funded.

"The errors on the payroll have been addressed by our staff and those who were affected will soon get their paychecks and reimbursements within this week," said Sablan, refusing to disclose the approximate amount accidentally cut from the employees' wages.

Sablan said PSS staff started resolving the issue as soon as they reported for work Tuesday.

"We're happy to report that processing for their payments are being prepared," the commissioner added.

Because of concern on the plight of public school teachers, Association of Commonwealth Teachers president Betty Miller immediately notified members about the Friday incident.

"I understand several employees discovered a shortage in their paychecks on Friday. To my understanding, this was due to excess Chapter 7 funds being withheld. PSS is aware of the problem and staff worked through the weekend to rectify the matter. I am hopeful those affected by these excess withholdings will receive reimbursement this week. Please notify me if this does not occur," Miller said in her e-mail to public school teachers on Monday.

Upcoming election

The ACT president has informed members about the upcoming election of the group's officers set for April 30.

Miller said the election committee is in the process of preparing for the selection of president and treasurer positions.

Anyone interested in running for either posts are advised to contact election chair Jaime Vergara at San Vicente Elementary School by March 1.

She said candidates will be given a one-month period to campaign, with elections on April 30, 2009.

GAO

From Page 1

Gov. Benigno Fitial had lauded the inclusion of the study, which will look at the effect of the minimum wage increase in the CNMI over the last three years, in the Senate version of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Under that version, Congress would receive the first report between March 15 and April 15, 2009. But the conference bill signed into law extended the deadline for Congress to receive the report to April 15, 2010, which means another 50-cent increase will occur in May this year. This will push the CNMI's minimum wage to $4.55 per hour.

By 2015, the minimum wage in the CNMI will increase to the federal level of $7.25 per hour.

"We are disappointed that the deadline for the minimum wage study was pushed back to 2010. This is a critical matter that should be addressed immediately because of the potential economic harm to the CNMI," said Charles P. Reyes, Jr., press secretary for the Governor's Office.

But, he added, a study by 2010 is better than no study at all.

The law instructs the Government Accountability Office to assess the impact of the minimum wage increase on the employment and living standards and estimate the impact of any further wage increases.

"These reports will alert members of Congress and [Obama] Administration officials to that which we already know—that during this economic depression in the CNMI, another increase in the minimum wage this year will further harm our businesses and our people as we struggle to rebound from the economic downturn," Fitial said in his statement applauding the Senate's version of the bill.

"We ask Congress to take a close look at these reports and consider offering American Samoa and the CNMI a deferment in the next increase in the minimum wage so the tourism industry and other businesses throughout the CNMI can regain some economic footing in this very challenging economic environment," he added.

Meanwhile, CNMI delegate Gregorio "Kilili" Sablan said he does not want to co-sign a letter that asks for a suspension of the wage increase until a study can be conducted.

Last week, Fitial called on the delegate to join him and Senate President Pete Reyes in asking U.S. House Education and Labor Committee chair George Miller for a suspension.

Sablan said he wants to wait to see the results of an objective study before deciding how to approach the matter.

Fitial is disappointed the CNMI and American Samoa failed to receive Sablan's support, press secretary Reyes said.

"[Sablan] did not have to ask for a suspension. He could have asked for a study to guide suspension or further increases. Instead, he did not join American Samoa and the Governor of the CNMI, and he did not ask for anything regarding the federal minimum wage, which is a very serious economic issue for our economy and for struggling businesses right now," he added.

'No fee increases at CHC'

Only 'pricing' for some services

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The Department of Public Health yesterday clarified that it has not raised its fees but has only put prices on certain services and procedures on its schedule of fees that were not used previously by medical providers.

Esther Muna, chief financial officer at DPH, yesterday said there are hundreds of procedures in the current procedural terminology structure and not all are used by Commonwealth Health Center providers and therefore not "priced."

She said CHC must publish amended regulations to add a CPT code that best describes the procedure not listed on the current schedule of fees.

For example, a procedure called the "repair blood vessel lesion direct; hand, finger" with CPT code 35207 is listed as having a physician/professional fee/component of $1,427.07 and $5 for technical/facility fee component.

Muna said this fee was not included in the last publication of fee schedule in October 2007.

"An amendment is necessary to 'add' fees to the current fee schedule," she said. "CHC did not increase their rates since the last publication in October 2007."

The CPT codes determine the structure of the fees at CHC. Recent changes make it necessary for CHC to make amendments to its schedule of fees, as described by the CPT structure.

CHC physicians do not necessarily perform services listed in the CPT Manual. Therefore, when physicians find services and procedures are necessary for the medical care of the patient, CHC must price them and include them on the schedule of fees.

On Jan. 23, Health Secretary Joseph Kevin Villagomez approved emergency regulations amending CHC's schedule of fees.

"These rules and regulations provide for the adoption of new and amended rates for the services and procedures provided at the Commonwealth Health Center. Specifically, they provide that services and procedures are priced for billing purposes," the regulations state.

The emergency regulations became effective immediately upon filing with the Commonwealth Register on Jan. 28 and delivery to Gov. Benigno R. Fitial on the same date.

San Vicente project will push through—BOE

BY MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

Education board members yesterday disclosed that San Vicente Elementary School will push through as scheduled the rehabilitation of its Kindergarten classroom after the school successfully acquired a $51,620 appropriation from the Legislature. The money is provided in Public Law 16-12, which sourced the money from the developer's tax appropriations fund balance.

Last week, the board approved the reprogramming of $120,000 from the SVES project to the Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School so it could renovate its dilapidated classrooms.

With a promised reimbursement by June from the governor, board vice chair Herman T. Guerrero said yesterday that if reimbursement does happen, the money will be given back to the $1.2 million fund for all schools' immediate repairs.

"Papers and permits are being prepared and reviewed by the Department of Public Works… and anytime this month, rehabilitation of the Kindergarten classroom will begin. The money will come from the appropriation from the Legislature and so we don't have a problem pursuing that project," he told Saipan Tribune.

Guerrero said the reimbursement of the GTC funds may still go to San Vicente if there's an immediate need to address other needs like termite eradication and electrical upgrade.

"We need to put back the money so we can address other schools' immediate concerns. If there's a great need to solve some problems at SVES, we can still provide the reimbursement to them," the vice chair said.

PSS and the board had requested the governor last year to reprogram some $8.2 million CIP money for school renovations and repairs. However, only $1.2 million was approved by the island's chief executive.

According to CIP board committee chair Marylou S. Ada, the $1.2 million reprogrammed funds are intended for schools' priority list.

She admitted having a long list of "concerns" from schools that simultaneously need to be worked out by the system. She said the approved fund is not enough for all schools' needs.

In San Vicente, two Kindergarten classrooms will be demolished. Made of wooden materials, the buildings are about 20 years old.

Saipan Tribune learned that the San Vicente PTA conducted various school fundraisers to construct the first Kindergarten classrooms.

The old Kindergarten facilities were supposed to be temporary structures. However, due to overcrowding on campus, also a result of the lack of funding, the school was forced to keep using the buildings.

The board members yesterday indicated that it's the target of the school to build the new facility before the opening of the next school year in September.

DESPITE REPORT OF SALE

Business as usual at Shell stations

It's business as usual at Shell gasoline stations on Saipan despite a report that Shell is selling its assets in the CNMI, Guam and Palau to Honolulu-based Aloha Petroleum Ltd.

Jeff P. Boyer, retail area manager for Shell Saipan, said any change in ownership will be communicated to the management and staff.

"Right now, I'm still an employee of Shell. We don't have any information about the sale," said Boyer. "It's business as usual."

Jim Arenovski, co-owner of Delta Management Corp.-Saipan which operates three Shell gas stations on the island, said they have not received any communication about the sale. Delta Management Corp. in Guam operates four Shell service stations on the island.

Saipan has a total of eight Shell service stations.

Marianas Business Journal earlier reported that Shell is proceeding to sell its retail stations in Guam, the CNMI and Palau to Aloha Petroleum Ltd.

Aloha Petroleum, according to its website, is Hawaii's largest independently owned gasoline, diesel, biodiesel, ethanol, and lubricants distributor.

It operates 30 Island Mini-Mart convenience stores and over 70 Aloha Gasoline stations in Hawaii. ***(Haidee V. Eugenio)***

New law creates autism commission

By KRISTI EATON
kristi_eaton@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Despite concerns raised by officials within the Public School System, acting governor Timothy Villagomez signed a bill into law yesterday that creates a Commonwealth Autism Commission.

Public Law 16-28 will establish the Commonwealth Commission on Autism to study and investigate issues, including the early identification and intervention of autism spectrum disorders.

Rep. Heinz Hofschneider who introduced the measure, stated in the bill that autism is the fastest growing serious developmental disability in the United States and the Commonwealth.

But PSS Education Commissioner Rita Sablan and Board of Education chair Lucy Blanco-Maratita both opposed the legislation, saying that, although the intent to create a commission is commendable, the Public School System couldn't support the bill because it seems to circumvent certain local and federal regulations of both education and governmental entities.

Villagomez also signed into law a bill that amends the terms of members of the Election Commission.

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Power consumption expected to decline at SSHS

BY MONETH G. DEPOSA
moneth_deposa@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Saipan Southern High School's consumption of power is now expected to go down following the installation yesterday of the school's first-ever alternative energy, which will use a combination of both solar and wind sources on campus.

Speaking before students, school leaders and elected officials, Education Commissioner Dr. Rita A. Sablan described yesterday's event as another significant milestone for public education.

"We're happy to see this milestone at SSHS. Just a few months ago, we're looking at our school energy bills and we're convinced that we need to do something. Now with this windmill solar panel, we may be able to reduce our energy consumption," she said.

Utilities, which remain an unfunded item for PSS, poses as the system's greatest challenge this fiscal year, with an estimated expense of about $3.4 million.

The wind turbine project will allow the school to save up to $250 in its monthly electrical billing.

According to Robert Jordan, Allied Pacific Environmental Consultant program manager, the Skystream 3.7 wind turbine and nine Kyocera 18V solar panels installed yesterday will be capable of supplying power to the school's main science laboratory, water pump and other units.

Costing about $90,000 including equipment and installations, the project's cost was sourced from Concorde's penalty to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency amounting to $56,300—or 80 percent of the company's $81,000 total fine.

Jordan said a previous $20,000 donation to the school was added to complete the undertaking.

He said the recurrent power outages and PSS' interest in alternative energy motivated the school to accept the project.

Education Board chair Lucy Blanco-Maratita said yesterday the new equipment will help instill in the minds of students the importance of saving energy at all times.

According to the project's experts, the energy produced by the wind turbine and solar panels will be recorded and measured by means of the Skystream's internal data logging system and also by the green meter. Electrical energy will be stored in a specially designed battery bank system for use within the science classroom.

Concorde Garment Manufacturing Co. legal counsel Steve Pixley, in yesterday's event, lauded the hard work and cooperation of all parties involved in the project.

CONGRATULATIONS!
Rota resident Woody Carlo C. Manglona recently graduated from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, California, on Feb. 13, 2009. Manglona is currently assigned to the 1st Battalion Bravo Company, Platoon 1034. His proud parents are Richard S. and Zena C. Manglona of Rota. He is presently on the island of Rota on a recruiter assistant assignment.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

'Slaughterhouse operator owes 9-year rental, abandoned bldg.'

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Department of Lands and Natural Resources is suing a company that used to operate the As Perdido Slaughterhouse for allegedly not paying rent for nine years and then abandoning the premises.

DLNR, through the Attorney General's Office, sued the reportedly bankrupt Seishin Farm Saipan Inc. for breach of lease agreement. DLNR demanded damages, attorney's fees, and court costs.

DLNR entered into a slaughterhouse management lease agreement with Seishin Farm in February 1999 for the 1,542 square meters property located in As Perdido.

Under the 15-year lease agreement, Seishin was given rights to the slaughterhouse and all machinery that came with the building.

Assistant attorney general Meaghan Hassel-Shearer stated in the complaint that, after signing the lease agreement, Seishin made an initial prorated rent payment of $10,000 on March 1, 1999. This was the only rent payment that Seishin ever made, Hassel-Shearer said, failing to make rent payments from 2000 to 2008.

The government lawyer said the defendant also failed to submit annual financial statements for the periods beginning 2001 to 2007.

After obtaining the lease agreement, Seishin never procured liability insurance as required by the agreement.

Hassel-Shearer said that on Nov. 29, 2006, Dr. Ronald K. Jones of the U.S. Department of Agriculture wrote to Tadashi Naruze of Seishin, saying Seishin must respond within 10 days about the company's intention regarding the slaughterhouse's operations requiring federal inspection services.

Furthermore, the letter stated that "there is no evidence of operations at [Seishin's] location."

In January 2007, USDA filed a notice titled "Voluntary Suspension or Voluntary Withdrawal of Inspection Service."

Hassel-Shearer said the note stated that "authority to use labels bearing the Department's inspection mark are hereby suspended."

After receiving this letter, the lawyer said, Seishin effectively abandoned the property.

In October 2007, DLNR Secretary Dr. Ignacio T. Dela Cruz wrote Seishin's vice president Mitsugi Takagi to outline the numerous provisions of the agreement that the company had defaulted on.

Dela Cruz further explained that a provision of the agreement provides remedy of termination of the lease should the company remains in default.

Hassel-Shearer said Seishin failed to respond to the letter.

The AGO requested for meetings to discuss terminating the lease agreement, but all letters were returned to AGO as they were not collected.

Deeming the premises to be abandoned, DLNR entered the As Perdido premises in February 2008.

Hassel-Shearer said DLNR discovered among other things that the freezer room no longer worked; the equipment that was leased to Seishin was rusted out; the fenced lot needed to be repaired; and numerous other restorations needed to be completed.

OPA urges proper use of govt cars

The Office of the Public Auditor issued a reminder yesterday to government employees about the proper use of government-owned vehicles, particularly the use of unmarked vehicles.

According to the Government Vehicle Act of 1994, 1 CMC § 7406:

■ Only government employees may operate a government vehicle. This does not apply to official guests and visitors to the Commonwealth.

■ Government vehicles are only to be used for official government business. This does not apply to elected officials.

■ Only elected officials, judges, and law enforcement officials, with proper authorization, may operate an unmarked government vehicle.

■ Government vehicles may not be tinted, except for law enforcement vehicles.

"In summary, a properly marked vehicle may be operated by government employees and authorized official guests to the Commonwealth. An unmarked government vehicle, however, may only be operated by elected officials, judges, and law enforcement officials, with proper authorization," the OPA statement said.

Also, only elected officials may operate a government vehicle for purposes other than official government business, OPA said.

"If an elected official wishes to extend the use of his/her government vehicle to government employees on official business, the government vehicle must be marked. Otherwise, the law provides that only other elected officials, judges, and authorized law enforcement officials may operate an unmarked vehicle," it added.

If an employee operates a government vehicle outside normal working hours, OPA said the employee must have authorization from the expenditure authority certifying that the use of the vehicle outside normal working hours is for official government business and stating the reason that the vehicle may be used. ***(OPA)***

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
CNMI GOVERNMENT

INVITATION TO BID
ITB NO.: ITB09-OHS-053

SUBMISSION DATE: MARCH 10, 2009 • TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"PURCHASE AND INSTALLATION OF A DIESEL GENERATOR INCLUDING CONSTRUCTION OF A GENERATOR HOUSE FOR THE CNMI OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY BUILDING #1326, CAPITOL HILL, SAIPAN"

COPIES OF THE SCOPE OF WORK MAY BE PICKED-UP AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY IN LOWER BASE DR., SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

A MANDATORY PRE-BID CONFERENCE IS SCHEDULED FOR **9:30 A.M., LOCAL TIME, MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2009** AT THE OFFICE OF HOME AND SECURITY BUILDING #1326, CAPITOL HILL, SAIPAN. **ALL QUESTIONS REGARDING** THIS PROJECT MUST BE SUBMITTED IN WRITING TO THE SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR HOMELAND SECURITY OR FAXED TO (670) 664-2218 NO LATER THAN THE **CLOSE OF BUSINESS, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2009.**

LOCAL BIDDERS PREFERENCE IS **NOT AVAILABLE** TO LOCAL BIDDERS BECAUSE THE FEDERAL GRANTOR AGENCY, THE U.S. OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY, HAS CERTIFIED THAT SUCH PREFERENCE IS IN CONFLICT WITH THE AGENCY'S GRANT CONDITIONS.

/s/ **PATRICK J. TENORIO**
SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR
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Holy Hong Kong, batman!

By KRISTI EATON
kristi_eaton@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

After riding to the top of the Peak Tram, the islands of Hong Kong and Kowloon are visible.

KRISTI EATON

The view of Hong Kong Island from aboard the Star Ferry.

KRISTI EATON

Living on Saipan has changed me.

I learned this as I traveled to Hong Kong for the first time.

A mere three months ago I couldn't wait to have a one-day layover in Tokyo so I could see and experience city life again, but, while I enjoyed Hong Kong, everything about it and everything I once loved about city life overwhelmed me.

Once I got off the bus from the airport and arrived on Kowloon Island I immediately experienced sensory overload—my head hurt from the bright neon lights, my ears ached from the car horns, the exhaust smelled terrible and the smog in the air irritated my skin and eyes.

KRISTI EATON
Neon lights line a Kowloon Island street.

KRISTI EATON
A pagoda within the grounds of the Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

But a mere four days earlier I had been experiencing island fever, so I was determined to enjoy my time as I navigated through buses, men hawking fake designer bags and tourists snapping photos.

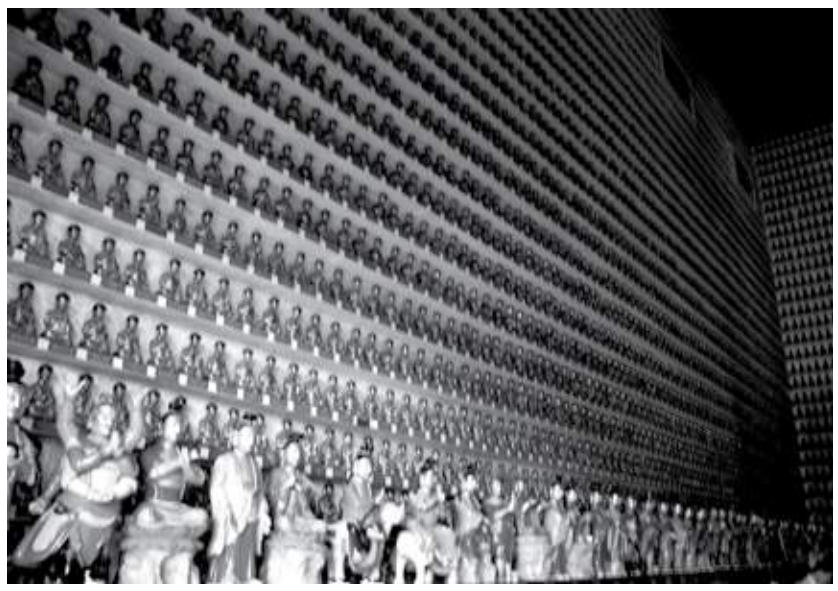
As I walked out of my hotel I ran into a fellow female traveler, who was in Hong Kong for the first time during a four-day layover from New Zealand back to her native Germany. With a new friend made and plans set, I was ready to explore Hong Kong.

I took the Star Ferry for $2.20 Hong Kong dollars ($7.80 HK dollars to every U.S. dollar) from Kowloon Island to Hong Kong Island. There I walked through a street market that was not for the faint of heart or vegetarians. Fish flopped around as they were pulled from the water and strewn right in front of me. Pig legs hung from wires as butchers prepared meat right in front of the buyer. Walking—something I'm almost always in the mood for—was my next task. I walked across the island to Victoria Park, described as Hong Kong's equivalent to NYC's Central Park—a description I found quite accurate as I looked around at the green trees, joggers, children playing and looked beyond to the skyscrapers.

The next day was a busy, but exciting day. I met up with my new friend and we headed to the Po Lin Monastery and Tian Tan Buddha Statue by boarding the Star Ferry to Hong Kong Island, then transferring by another ferry to Lantau Island. Once on Lantau, I felt like I was in another country. The pace was slower, shops were smaller, and people seemed more relaxed. We hopped on a bus to the other side of the island and arrived 40 minutes later.

The 25-minute Ngong Ping Cable Car ride was a great way to see some of the island, as well as other parts of Hong Kong before walking up the many steps to the Tian Tan Buddha Statue, which is a site to behold. It can be seen from miles away. And with the Po Lin Monastery nearby, monks are seen roaming through the tourist friendly shopping village close by. I'd wanted to get a picture with a monk all day, but was too ashamed and embarrassed to ask. Thankfully, Miriam, my new friend, was not afraid to ask two monks for me. They happily obliged. I laughed a little as they whipped out their own digital camera so they could take their own picture of us.

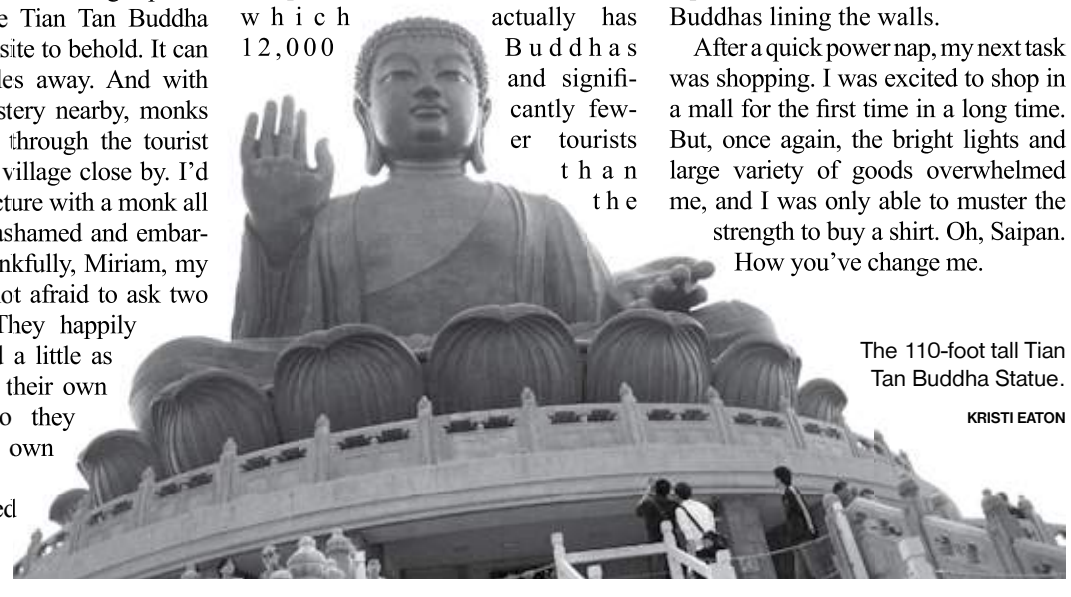
The day ended with a ride up the Peak Tram to Victoria Peak. The peak, right in the middle of Hong Kong Island, provided great views of Hong Kong and Kowloon islands. (33 Hong Kong dollars)



KRISTI EATON
Mini-Buddhas line the walls of a room in the Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

I guess the 110 foot tall Tian Tan Buddha Statue wasn't enough for me, because the next day I headed to the Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas, which actually has 12,000 Buddhas and significantly fewer tourists than the giant statue. The area was very calm and relaxing. Although I walked up hundreds of steps lined with Buddhas, I thought the temple name was misleading. There was no way there were 10,000 Buddhas, I thought to myself. That was until I got to the top and saw rooms filled with mini-Buddhas lining the walls.

After a quick power nap, my next task was shopping. I was excited to shop in a mall for the first time in a long time. But, once again, the bright lights and large variety of goods overwhelmed me, and I was only able to muster the strength to buy a shirt. Oh, Saipan. How you've change me.



The 110-foot tall Tian Tan Buddha Statue.

KRISTI EATON

BOG hosts TV commercial contest

HAGATNA, Guam—The Bank of Guam has launched a competition to select broadcast quality 30-second commercials to be used by the bank.

The contest is open to all high school and college students, who will have chances to win cash prizes. All entries are due March 13, 2009.

The theme of the contest is "Meeting the financial needs of our community."

Contest guidelines are as follows:

■ Categories: 1) Savings Accounts, 2) Consumer Loans/ Credit Cards.

■ Bonus Category: Bank of Guam Image

■ Medium: Submissions must be no more than 26 seconds in length. Entries must be submitted on a CD/DVD and must be of broadcast quality

■ Eligibility: Open to all high school and college/university students throughout Guam, CNMI, Republic of Belau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Entries may be submitted by an individual or a group

Enrollment includes the registration form, release of commercial agreement and model/ image(s) release form.

Cash prizes will be awarded as follows: $2,000 first prize; $1,000 second prize; $500 third prize; $500 bonus category prize.

Entry forms are available at all high schools, the University of Guam, Guam Community College, NMI College, Palau Community College, College of Micronesia and Bank of Guam branches and its website www.bankofguam.com.

For more information, contact Kebrina Duenas at 472-5236 or e-mail at kebrina.duenas@bankofguam.com. ***(PR)***

DEQ sets Makaka Beach cleanup

The Division of Environmental Quality's cleanup brigade will be at it again, picking up trash at Makaka Beach in Garapan

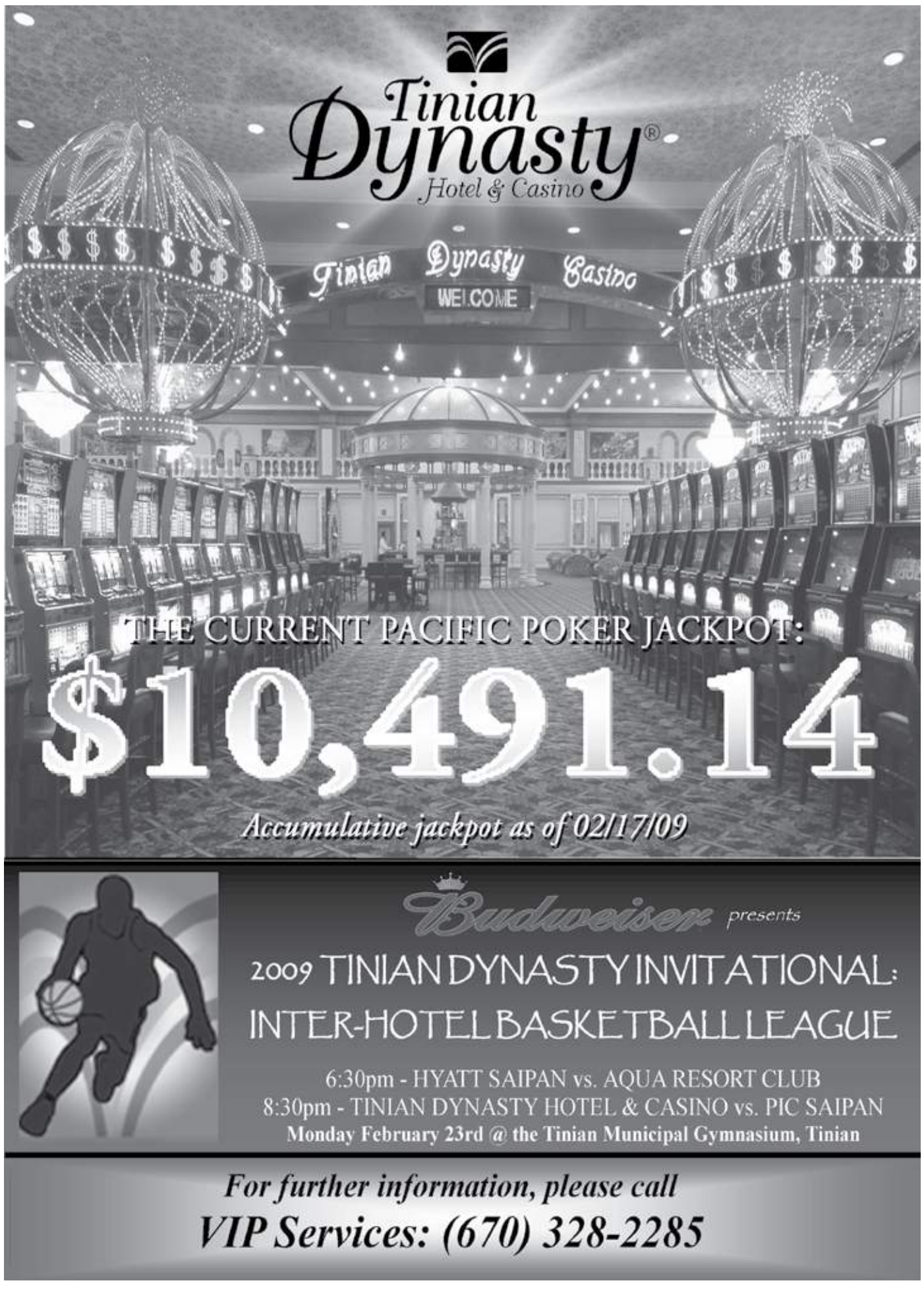
If you would like to volunteer your time to clean and beautify the island, meet with the volunteers on Saturday, March 7, 2009, at 8am behind the ABC store.

Volunteers will split into groups, cleaning north and south of Makaka Beach until 10am, break for drinks, and then continue, if needed.

This month, outstanding brigade volunteers who participated in at least 10 monthly cleanups will receive a brigade cap and those who participated in at least three cleanups will receive a green brigade t-shirt.

Last month, 60 volunteers removed 1,180 lbs of debris from Coral Ocean Point. The DEQ cleanup brigade began in 1996 and continues to maintain clean, healthy beaches.

For more information about volunteering, contact the DEQ office at 664-8500. ***(DEQ)***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Flashback

A LOOK BACK AT PAST YEARS' HEADLINES

February 19, 1999

Gov't warns of layoffs

Commonwealth officials yesterday warned of a 45 percent drop in the revised resource projections for FY 1999 that is threatening to set off massive government job cuts and disruption in critical services provided to the community. The $1 billion dollar lawsuit against local garment manufacturers and US retailers and a further 10 percent reduction in tourism revenues would slash close to $100 million from the general funds previously projected at $216 million by the local government. Michael S. Sablan, special advisor on budget and finance to Gov. Pedro P. Tenorio, told visiting members of the US House Resources Committee the combined fiscal impact of the decrease in anticipated revenue collections would push the island economy into a potential financial nightmare.

NMC found giving selective raises

A handful of high-ranking officials in the Northern Marianas College had received hefty salary raise, while those under the "graded" category had to wait for available funds before they get pay increase due to the austerity measures of the Tenorio administration. These were the findings of the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare at the resumption of the oversight hearing on the state college yesterday in what its chair Rep. Heinz Hofschneider considered a violation of existing regulations. The hearing, the fourth in a series of investigation, presented hard evidence to bolster allegations of mismanagement and inconsistency in policy that have thrown NMC into deep financial trouble in the past few years.

February 19, 2001

Construction industry inches upward

Major government projects will stimulate the construction business this year as the Department of Public Works revealed the issuance of building and construction permits worth over $6 million last month. The $5.2 million state-of-the-art Youth Detention facility project and two small-scale construction activities comprised the revenue generated by the Building Safety Code Division of DPW, safety official Donald W. Anderson disclosed Friday. In addition to Youth Detention facility, bidding for the $25 million Marpi Landfill project is scheduled to start while the $26 million Correctional facility and two public high schools are set to start late this year.

Teno sends back appropriation bills

Governor Pedro P. Tenorio last Friday tossed back to the legislature a bill that seeks to reappropriate unused funds from two public laws amounting to $256,636 for the construction and renovation of school buildings. The two appropriation mesaures were disapproved after Governor Tenorio found that Legislators failed to identify sources of fund. In his statement, the Governor explained that,"Although the bill indicates that the fund balances from Public Laws Nos. 9-1 and 10-38 are to be used for the construction and renovation of various school projects on Saipan, it does not list the specific projects from which the funds will come from."

February 19, 2002

Education gap widens

The Fiscal Year 2002 education revenue per public school student closed at $3,538 per child-a jolting 50 percent less than what US mainland students are getting at $7,081. The standing $3,538-figure is at its lowest in four years, a proximate result of plunging government revenues which started rolling downhill in FY1998, a Public School System FY1998 through 2002 Fiscal Outlook report showed. "For every dollar that US mainland kids get, CNMI kids get 50 cents," said acting PSS Fiscal and Budget officer William Matson.

CPA probes 2 incidents involving PIA airplanes

The Commonwealth Ports Authority will investigate two incidents involving the Pacific Island Aviation, following reports that 19 passengers were prevented from getting off the aircraft after a near-accident at the Saipan International Airport Saturday night. CPA Executive Director Carlos H. Salas, reacting on reports received about the incidents at the Tinian and Saipan airports, said the ports authority will launch a deeper investigation today. Salas said he has not received any official report from the PIA and Northwest Airlines regarding the incidents as of press time yesterday. "I don't know about the incident but we heard reports. I will start the inquiry today and find out what really transpired."

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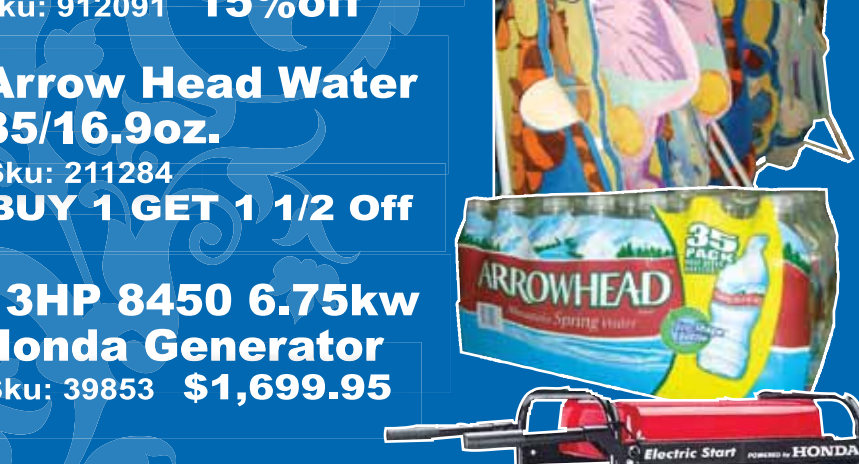

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Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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EDITORIAL

Papal damage control

For the second time in his brief pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI is engaged in damage control after offending another religion with which the Roman Catholic Church has been seeking better relations. Benedict is no doubt sincere in dissociating himself from a breakaway bishop's suggestion that no Jews died in Nazi gas chambers. But a disclaimer wouldn't have been necessary if the pope had exercised due diligence or demonstrated even the slightest sensitivity before rescinding the excommunication of Richard Williamson and three other prelates from the Society of St. Pius X.

Williamson was excommunicated by Pope John Paul II after he was ordained a bishop by the late Marcel Lefebvre, a French archbishop who rejected the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. In a television interview aired the same day his excommunication was lifted, Williamson said the evidence was "hugely against" 6 million Jews having been killed in gas chambers.

After Williamson's comments were publicized, the pope reiterated his condemnation of the Holocaust and announced a trip to Israel in May. The Vatican said that Williamson would have to "take his distance" from his comments about the Holocaust if he wanted to be recognized as a bishop. Williamson apologized for causing "unnecessary distress and problems," but he didn't recant his denial of the Holocaust. Instead, he told a German magazine that he would "look again at the historical evidence."

How could the pope rehabilitate a crank such as Williamson without a thorough investigation? One explanation is that the pope has been obsessed with reconciliation with Lefebvrites, who share his devotion to the 16th century Tridentine Latin Mass that was replaced by vernacular services after Vatican II. That may account for the pope's failure to consult with Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Vatican official in charge of ecumenical relations, but reconciliation with one group should not involve indifference toward another.

Moreover, the Williamson affair seems to be part of the pope's general insulation from public opinion, which can border on arrogance. In a 2006 lecture in his native Germany, Benedict quoted a Byzantine emperor who described Islam as "evil and inhumane." The pope didn't endorse the statement, but he failed to recognize how his words would be received by Muslims.

Josef Stalin once mockingly asked: "How many divisions does the pope have?" Obviously the pope doesn't command an army, but the Roman Catholic Church is represented by legions of diplomats and humanitarian workers around the world, many of whom must deal with representatives of other religions. The pope is a pastor, but he also is the head of an international organization, and like more worldly leaders, he must carefully weigh his words and his deeds.

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HE SAYS HE'S COMING TO LIVE WITH YOU IF YOU INSIST ON POURING ALL THAT MONEY DOWN HIS RAT HOLE.
STIMULUS BILL
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Financial erosion

"There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency. The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law on the side of destruction, and does it in a manner which not one man in a million is able to diagnose."

—Lord John Maynard Keynes, British economist

By RIK and JANEL VILLEGAS
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Rik is a business instructor at NMC and Janel is a partner with BizResults, LLC (www.bizresults.org). They can be contacted at biz_results@yahoo.com.

When we moved to Saipan over 11 years ago, the college offered either housing assistance or one of the houses they owned on Capital Hill to help newly hired faculty transition during their first three years. We chose to take the house and we had many fond memories living there, raising our young family, and entertaining friends. During our first four months in the latter part of 1997, we experienced three supertyphoons that caused a couple of trees to topple over, but we felt safe and secure in our cinderblock home that had been built during the Trust Territory years.

When our three years were up, we moved out of the house into another home on Capital Hill, but no one moved in to help maintain the old place because the government had taken possession of the homes from the college. Years later when we stopped by the original house, we were amazed to see how the jungle has taken it over. It can hardly be seen from the road because of the vegetation growth, and termites have eaten most of the wood. What was once a vibrant and active dwelling place that was well maintained has become an abandoned, uninhabitable building.

It's difficult to keep anything for any length of time on Saipan. A typhoon will create very visible signs of destruction within a few hours, while humidity, salt, termites, and jungle growth may take years to wreak havoc on any inanimate object that is not regularly maintained. The signs of erosion and decay are subtle, but apparent over time.

The governor is proposing a reduction in pay that would amount to a 20-percent cut for most government-paid employees. Like a typhoon, the impact would have an immediate and devastating impact on those affected. That means that someone with a gross salary of $3,000 per month would now make $2,400.

What is even more harmful is the slow, but steady financial erosion that everyone in the private and public sector has suffered over the last few years. Like a slowly eroding house that is full of termites, no one may notice what is happening at the moment, but its effect is irredeemable and devastating over time.

We're talking about inflation: the cancer of financial prosperity. To get an idea of how inflation has affected your pocketbook, go to http://www.westegg.com/inflation, and type in your monthly gross income, the last year of your pay raise and then 2007 (the most recent year you can enter). When you hit the submit button, be prepared to be shocked (unless you just got a pay raise).

For example, if my last pay increase was $3,000 per month in 1997, I would have to make $3,861.99 in 2007 to have the same buying power as I did in 1997. If I were to buy exactly the same products in 2007 and 1997, it would cost $3,000 and $2,355.61 respectively. That's over 20 percent less! In other words, what the governor is proposing in one fell swoop has already happened to your paycheck over time. If you haven't had much of a pay increase in the last decade, and you become a victim of the four-day workweek, then you are going to have to struggle on not 20 percent, but more than 40 percent less than what you could have bought 10 years ago. The rationale for the cut is that it's better to have some than none. That would be fine if the "some" paid the bills, but it will only help dig a deeper financial hole for many people.

In essence, inflation ensures you have a pay decrease every year, even though your salary remains the same. That's why you're having a harder time making ends meet. Bills keep piling up, and your

See FINANCIAL on Next Page

EDITORIAL POLICY The *Saipan Tribune* welcomes comments on any article, column, editorial, or topic that may be of interest to the public. Letters to the editor must include the name, address, and contact number of the contributor. Letters that are critical in nature should focus on issues, not personalities. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, CIC Centre, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Horace

By STEPHEN B. SMITH
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Stephen B. Smith is the Accreditation, Language Arts, and National Forensic League coordinator for the Public School System Central Office.

There is a saying that there is nothing new under the sun. Well, truer words were never spoken. It is a cliché that "those who do not learn from the past will be destined to re-live it." The truth of this last is so obvious as to need no explanation or defense. We are living through a rough period economically. Businesses are struggling to survive. What's the answer?

Management is one of those kinds of things that include many elements that, taken together, make up a whole. Years ago, in college (USC) while studying business, I learned that there were two basic management styles: theory X and theory Y.

A theory X manager's mantra was, and I suppose still is, that if an employee does a good job, he or she gets to keep it. The theory Y manager was, and is, the opposite. He operates in the belief that it is his job to motivate the employee to perform at a high level and dedicates himself to learning how to do it.

I suppose that both styles can be effective so long as certain basic realities are met. And, I suppose it doesn't matter what the industry is either. Whether one is a teacher, a steel worker, a bartender, it doesn't matter. The key for both management and employee is the same: it is "commitment to excellence" that matters and only that. While the notion that such a commitment isn't new, indeed it is in every sense a perennial truth; it was first voiced in that particular way by a fellow who lived and wrote a very long time ago: Quintus Horatius Flaccus, a.k.a. the Roman poet Horace (d. 8 BC). He is credited with other such maxims as well. "Carpe diem" comes to mind ('Seize the day'). But, maxims without specificity are just, well, poetry.

A teacher committed to excellence will assess his students, plan lessons, present the lessons, reassess to ensure understanding and finally build upon what they have learned; this last is an example of scaffolding. Similarly a steel worker will know and understand not only his job, but the jobs of others around him so as to maximize both safety and productiveness; this last an example of vertical alignment of responsibility. A bartender is not merely a drink server, oh no. A bartender is a psychologist, a philosopher, a conversationalist; well, you get the idea.

Businesses and industries that succeed understand that committed performance both on the part of management and on the part of the corps of employees is everything. Employees must be learned in the requirements of the job; a teacher who knows nothing about managing a classroom won't last. Workers must be capable of doing the job to begin with; it is highly unlikely that a woman will ever be offered a job as defensive end for the Green Bay Packers. And finally, and frankly, employees and management alike must be "into the job"; If one does not like what one is doing, do something else.

We are in a recession—no one as yet has had the courage to voice the term "depression," but someone whose job it is will no doubt be doing so at some point. The good news is, as with all similar things, it will end; it's the nature of the beast. When will it end? It will end when all of the parties involved become committed to excellence in everything that they do.

If Horace were here today, and oh how I wish it were so, he would likely be hired by GM or BofA or some other major player on the world economic stage. And I think his advice to them would be to trust in each other and commit to excellence.

Why Article 12 should be abolished: A short story

By ALEXANDER A. SABLAN
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Alexander A. Sablan is the marketing manager of Saipan Shipping Co. Inc., a former president of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce, and a member of Citizens to Change Article 12. He lives in Kagman II.

Buenas yan saludo taotao Marianas. I am writing to share my reasons to vote to end Article 12 in November 2011.

First, I would hope that going forward those that may have an opinion to maintain the status quo or end Article 12 would conduct themselves professionally and not label or chastise individuals in a callous or derogatory manner. I agree with one and all this is a very sensitive subject but it does not need to be personal and everyone is respectfully entitled to their opinion.

I begin by telling you that my wife and I are ordinary hardworking blue collar to white collar individuals. When we returned to Saipan after pursuing our education abroad, I worked three minimum wage jobs to survive, we excelled quickly and over time out of a necessity to raise a family of three and we are now putting them through college. As with countless others in our community, my family personally struggled. Nothing was handed to me on a silver platter. I had to endure hardships to accomplish what I have and am not ashamed of the fruits of my labor. I don't pretend to be unique; there are countless families and friends who have gone through the same ordeal.

My wife Nora (Palaksi) was diagnosed with cancer many years ago. We, like many families on island, were stunned by the news but the shock soon wore off to the realization we had to do something about it. No one at that time had access to a cancer specialist (oncologist) in the CNMI. Guahan's cancer center was devastated by a typhoon and the nearest oncologist was in Hawaii. For some reason we did not qualify for the CNMI medical referral committees' requirement to be sent off-island for medical care. The Administration also stalled our request for (medical emergency) access to our tax rebate, which was two years delayed. We eventually got it but not when we really needed it.

At this point you may be asking yourself, "What do all these have to do with Article 12?" Well, if Article 12 did not exist, then like many Americans across the United States, we would have access to credit markets that would normally permit you to borrow against the equity in your home. Most of our banks no longer offer a Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC) portfolio because of the restrictions imposed by Article 12 should a client default on their loan. And as point of information, when banks did offer HELOC loans in the CNMI, it was 50 percent of the equity value and an excessively high interest rate, which isn't much when all is said and done.

So without much in the way of cash, we, as many families in the CNMI, emptied our savings, bloated our credit cards and had creditors coming after us from all sides over the years. Also, our only asset, our home, was on the brink of being foreclosed. Through it all, nothing was more important than Nora's life and despite our financial challenges she saw her oncologist every quarter. I did not care about debts (reckless I know) but her life meant everything and at that time creditors became an unfortunate distraction.

Thanks to our immediate families, CNMI Medical Referral & Committee, the current Administration, my employer SAISHIP and wife's employer FHP Health Clinic/Take Care Insurance, we hope the worst is behind us. We're getting back on our feet physically and financially. But I often wonder what other families have to go through when their government does abandon them, when they have no access to HELOC credit markets and are scraping by just to stay alive? For our family, this was an incredulous experience, to say the least.

Let me reiterate why we should do away with Article 12 from a recent letter to the editor, with regard to keeping the status quo. There are apparently over 3,000 applicants for the homestead program in the CNMI. The majority of these applicants reside on Saipan and the truth of the matter is there is clearly not enough public land to go around. So what does the future hold for adults young and old to break out and own their own home? Well, unless they have rich parents, inherit an estate, or win the lottery, at this stage "nothing". Why nothing? Because most banks in the CNMI will not lend money for mortgages unless you have an impeccable credit score of 720 and over, a co-signer, reasonable collateral, a 30 percent to 50 percent down payment and closing costs for the mortgage. What do current and future generations have to look forward to without access to credit markets? Living with Mom and Dad is not a sustainable solution.

It is no secret that land values are distinctly lower in the CNMI than our neighboring island of Guahan. Our depressed real estate market has a great deal to do with Article 12, our limited access to a current local market and not to a global market of fee simple buyers, and also our failure to maintain past zoning and building codes in the CNMI. But let me focus on Article 12. A couple of years ago, before the recent real estate market speculation boom, my good friend from Guahan, his parents' federal government retirees, in their early 70s, used their property on the outskirts of Mecheche - Dededo Village to build a modest two-bedroom home with all the bells and whistles. They did not have to put a penny down for their $130,000 mortgage loan, as their 1,000 sq. meter raw property, which was appraised at $55 a sq. meter, had sufficient appraised equity (collateral) to meet their bank's down payment and closing costs. This scenario could and would exist in the CNMI if Article 12 did not exist. I ask all of you that are currently landless and homeless: How, are you going to own land and a home in the CNMI without access to credit markets and reasonable appraised land values to obtain a mortgage loan? Private land and condominiums will be your only options going forward.

My last reason for this letter is "fairness". I believe Article 12 was a good thing when we started this wonderful CNMI over 30 years ago. The majority of people were not educated in the complexities of real estate transactions. Some may still not be. But that's why we have realtors, bank advisers, attorneys and many individuals on this island that can be tapped for advice. You're not alone anymore!

Further, we know many of our Chamorro and Carolinian people have married outside of our ethnicity. Their spouses and their children's children are grossly disenfranchised in familial estates. I ask you why anyone brought into a matrimonial union and may have offsprings in the process, why we should continue to discriminate against our own? Why doesn't this loving community of indigenous people not recognize that our people are choosing other ethnicities and are embracing them as a member of our society?

Why should we use culture in the discourse for keeping Article 12? Land has nothing to do with culture, it is an asset that should be shared amongst all that are in union with your family. How you choose to do so, absent Article 12, is your business. It should not be the business of our government! To be clear, I am speaking only about Article 12, which governs the ownership of private lands. Please resist the urge to confuse this with Article XI, which deals with public lands. I ask only that I be allowed to manage my private land as I see fit. There is no obligation for anyone to sell their land if they don't want to.

I know my reasons may not be unique and may have been contemplated by most individuals that have sat and seriously thought this issue through. I hope we do not lose sight of the opportunities to grow our society, provide for that dream of land and homeownership and lastly, to cite a very pointed quote I believe in, "No man is an island."

FINANCIAL

From Page 10

savings account is shrinking while your debt continues to rise.

You may be thinking that all of your worries will be over when the U.S. President hands out all of those BILLIONS to help stimulate the economy. Maybe you'll be lucky enough to get a tax rebate or a stimulus check, like the one that was given out last year. Maybe the CNMI will get MILLIONS to help create and pay for more government jobs and contracts.

Well, those BILLIONS are going to be added to the TRILLIONS in U.S. debt. The "smoke and mirrors" stimulus scheme using worthless fiat money may create an illusion of economic recovery for a period of time, but it will only devalue the dollar even further and eventually lead to hyperinflation, which is the terminal stage of any fiat currency. Hyperinflation is the result of increasing, regular inflation to the point where all consumer confidence is lost and once it is gone, the value of our paper currency will become irreversibly worthless.

The chart shows the insidious effects of inflation, sometimes referred to as the hidden tax, on the purchasing power of the dollar since 1950 (source: http://mwhodges.home.att.net). It's not totally accurate because since 1981 and 1995 the federal government changed how the Consumer Price Index is measured, which would more accurately place the value of a 1950 dollar at 9 cents using the old criteria—more smoke and mirrors stuff.

Like our first house that was slowly taken over by termites and the jungle, inflation is the financial erosion that will "debauch the currency" and eventually destroy what little buying power is still available. We know this is contrary to the hype, hope, and happiness that gets politicians elected, but we thought you might want to know what's going on behind the curtain.

"The first panacea for a mismanaged nation is inflation of the currency; the second is war. Both bring a temporary prosperity; both bring a permanent ruin. Both are the refuge of political and economic opportunists."

—Ernest Hemingway

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam Homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°

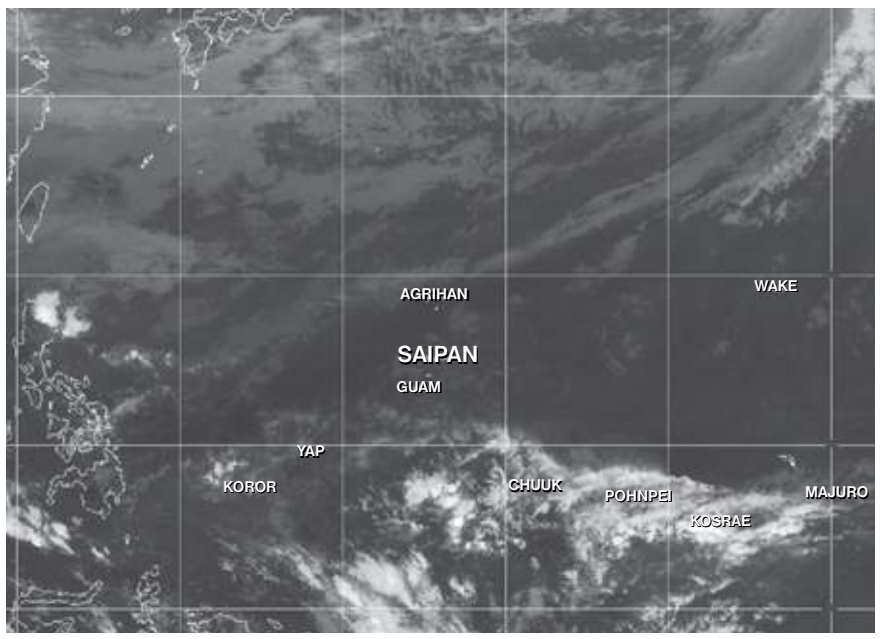
Micronesia

Guam and Rota	Partly Sunny	▲84	▼75
Palau	Showers	▲87	▼78
Yap	Showers	▲88	▼77
Chuuk	Showers	▲89	▼78
Pohnpei	Showers	▲87	▼76
Kosrae	Showers	▲88	▼78
Majuro	Showers	▲84	▼76

Around The Globe

Auckland	Showers	▲75	▼74
Beijing	Flurries	▲32	▼17
Hong Kong	Rain	▲73	▼64
Honolulu	Showers	▲75	▼67
London	Cloudy	▲48	▼39
Los Angeles	Mostly Sunny	▲72	▼50
Manila	Thundershowers	▲90	▼75
Melbourne	Sunny	▲83	▼66
Miami	Partly Sunny	▲80	▼53
New York	Cloudy	▲45	▼28
Osaka	Showers	▲48	▼44
Paris	Rain	▲45	▼35
Pusan	Rain	▲53	▼31
Rome	Sunny	▲46	▼25
Salem	Mostly Cloudy	▲53	▼32
San Francisco	Partly Sunny	▲61	▼46
Seoul	Rain/Snow	▲43	▼18
Tokyo	Mostly Cloudy	▲44	▼42
Washington, DC	Cloudy	▲46	▼26

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00PM, WEDNESDAY, FEB. 18, 2009
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A cold front extends southwestward from 25N160E to 22N152E then continues as a shear line to beyond 130E at 15N. A narrow band of low clouds and showers are found up to 50 miles behind the boundary. The near-equatorial trough extends eastward from 1N130E to EQ150E. Convergence associated with the equatorial trough and a weak wave along 145E is producing scattered showers southwest of Chuuk in an area bounded by EQ140E to EQ146E to 5N150E to 8N146E back to EQ140E. Trade-wind convergence is triggering scattered showers over Kosrae within 150 miles of a line extending from 4N156E to 7N171E. The area of showers is south of Pohnpei and southwest of Majuro.

Tides

Saipan Harbor		
5:44 AM Today	High Tide:	1.5 Feet
9:37 AM Today	Low Tide:	1.4 Feet
2:12 PM Today	High Tide:	1.6 Feet
10:33 PM Today	Low Tide:	0.1 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	6:40 AM	6:22 PM
Friday	6:39 AM	6:22 PM
Saturday	6:39 AM	6:23 PM
Sunday	6:38 AM	6:23 PM
Monday	6:38 AM	6:23 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	2:07 AM	1:26 PM
Friday	2:57 AM	2:18 PM
Saturday	3:45 AM	3:10 PM
Sunday	4:29 AM	4:02
Monday	5:11 AM	4:53 PM

GET YOUR PICTURES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS PUBLISHED—FOR FREE

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- ISLAND SNAPSHOTS
  Birthdays, baptisms, christenings, family gatherings, reunions, club activities, and other community-related events.
- BIRTHDAY GREETINGS
  A way for families and friends to greet their loved ones, accompanied by a picture of the person celebrating his/her birthday.
- BUSINESS
  Corporate donations, volunteer work, promotions, granting of awards, team-building exercises, meetings and other activities by members of the business community.
- SAMU'T SARI
  Pictures from the islands' Filipino community, primarily focusing on Filipino activities, gatherings, get-togethers, volunteer work, etc.
- TRAVELOGUE
  Pictures of off-island travels. Contributors may submit up to 10 pictures for consideration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- COMMUNITY BRIEFS
  Announcements of upcoming activities of organizations, community clubs, government agencies, and private companies.
- CAMPUS BULLETIN
  Announcements of upcoming activities in public and private schools, as well as calendar of activities. May include PTSA meetings, enrollment procedures.

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For pictures:

- Photos should be original and not copyrighted. Contributors must have the right to allow the *Saipan Tribune* to publish the pictures.
- Digital pictures should be high-resolution (minimum of 800kb).
- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and phone number.
- Photos must have been taken in the last two months.
- For birthday greetings, must be submitted no later than 12 noon of the previous day to make it to next day's edition.

For announcements:

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- Must be submitted no later than 12 noon to make it to next day's edition.

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- Fax: (670) 235-3740
- Mail: PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan, CNMI 96950
- Drop off: 2nd Floor, CIC Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan
  To check if contributions are received, call (670) 235-6397, 235-2440, 235-8747

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- The *Saipan Tribune* will decide how often community announcements are going to be published.
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- Call 234-7272 (PARA) on any telephone
- *11 on any PTI cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2009

DEPARTURES

Saipan-Rota			
CO9597	11:50am	12:25pm	1,7
Saipan-Guam			
CO9317	5:00am	5:50am	Daily
CO9313	8:30am	9:20am	Daily
CO9597	11:50am	1:20pm	1,7 via Rota
CO9601	12:30pm	1:20pm	2,3,4,5,6
CO9603	3:30pm	4:20pm	Daily
CO9605	6:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
CO9599	9:30pm	10:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Narita			
NW 099	5:00am	7:35am	Daily
NW 078	8:20am	1:30pm	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 075	4:55pm	7:30pm	Daily
Guam-Narita			
NW 73	4:10pm	7:00pm	Daily
NW 81	3:55pm	6:55pm	Daily
Saipan-Osaka			
OZ 119	4:00am	6:40am	1,4,6
NW 083	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Guam-Osaka			
NW 79	4:45pm	7:35pm	Daily
Saipan-Nagoya			
NW 078	8:20am	11:05am	Daily
Guam-Nagoya			
NW 23	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Incheon			
OZ 604	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ 604	2:40am	6:30am	2,3,4,5,6,7
OZ 119	4:00am	11:25am	1,4,6 via Osaka
OZ 606	3:20pm	7:00pm	Daily
Saipan-Busan			
OZ 608	3:20am	6:50am	1,4,5,7
Saipan-Shanghai			
FM 844	2:50am	5:40am	2,6
Rota-Guam			
CO 9597	12:50pm	1:20pm	1,7
Guam-Palau			
CO 953	7:40pm	8:40pm	1,7
CO 893	5:50pm	6:50pm	3,5
Palau-Manila			
CO 893	7:35pm	9:10pm	3,5
Guam-Manila			
CO 893	5:50pm	9:10pm	3,5 via Koror
CO 933	8:00pm	9:40pm	Daily
PR 111	6:00am	7:50am	1,2,4,6,7
Nagoya-Manila			
NW 71	8:40pm	11:55pm	Daily
Incheon-Hongkong			
OZ 721	9:20am	12:00pm	Daily
OZ 723	7:45pm	10:35pm	Daily
OZ 7173	8:00pm	10:50pm	5,7
Narita-Manila			
NW 1	7:00pm	10:55pm	Daily

ARRIVALS

Rota-Saipan			
CO 9598	3:25am	4:00am	5,6
Guam-Saipan			
CO 9316	2:30am	3:20am	1,2,3,4,7
CO9598	2:30am	4:00am	5,6 via Rota
CO9596	7:00am	7:50am	Daily
CO9600	10:20am	11:10am	Daily
CO9602	2:00pm	2:50pm	Daily
CO9604	5:00pm	5:50pm	Daily
CO9606	8:00pm	8:50pm	Daily
Narita-Saipan			
NW 076	10:15am	2:40pm	Daily
NW 077	6:25pm	1:20am+1	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 100	8:45pm	1:10am+1	Daily
Narita-Guam			
NW 74	9:45am	2:20pm	Daily
NW 82	10:30am	3:10pm	Daily
Osaka-Saipan			
OZ 120	9:50pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7
NW 084	10:40am	3:05pm	Daily
Osaka-Guam			
NW 80	10:30am	3:00pm	Daily
Nagoya-Saipan			
NW 077	9:00pm	1:20am+1	Daily
Nagoya-Guam			
NW 24	10:00am	2:30pm	Daily
Incheon-Saipan			
OZ 605	9:00am	2:20pm	Daily
OZ 603	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ 120	7:10pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7 via Osaka
OZ 603	8:10pm	1:30am+1	1,2,3,4,5,6
Busan-Saipan			
OZ 607	9:00pm	2:10am+1	3,4,6,7
Shanghai-Saipan			
FM 843	7:15pm	1:50am+1	1,5
Guam-Rota			
CO 9598	2:30am	3:00am	5,6
Palau-Guam			
CO 954	2:30am	5:25am	1,2
CO 892	2:35am	5:30am	4,6
Manila-Palau			
CO 892	10:10pm	1:50am+1	3,5
Manila-Guam			
CO 892	10:10pm	5:30am+1	3,5 via Koror
CO 934	11:10pm	4:40am+1	Daily
PR 110	10:10pm	4:00am+1	1,3,5,6,7
Manila-Nagoya			
NW 72	6:30am	11:05am	Daily
Hongkong-Incheon			
OZ 724	12:30am	4:50am	Daily
OZ 7183	12:45am	5:05am	1,4,6
OZ 722	1:30pm	5:45pm	Daily
Manila-Narita			
NW 2	7:45am	12:40pm	Daily

Editor's Note: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); CO: Continental; FM: Shanghai Airlines; PR: Philippine Airlines; NW: Northwest; OZ: Asiana
ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

FREEDOM AIR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
Guam-Rota			
FRE 100	7:00am	7:30am	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 100	7:50am	8:20am	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 200	9:00am	9:30am	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 200	9:50am	10:15am	Daily
Guam-Rota			
FRE 300	4:00pm	4:30pm	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 300	4:50pm	5:25pm	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 400	6:00pm	6:30pm	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 400	6:45pm	7:15pm	Daily
Saipan-Tinian			
FRE 101	6:45am	6:55am	Daily
FRE 103	7:30am	7:40am	Daily
FRE 105	8:00am	8:10am	Daily
FRE 107	8:40am	8:50am	Daily
FRE 109*	9:10am	9:20am	Daily
FRE 111*	10:45am	10:55am	Daily

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
FRE 113	11:40am	11:50am	Daily
FRE 115	1:00pm	1:10pm	Daily
FRE 117	2:30pm	2:40pm	Daily
FRE 119	4:00pm	4:10pm	Daily
FRE 121	4:40pm	4:50pm	Daily
FRE 123 *	5:40pm	5:50pm	Daily
FRE 125 *	6:00pm	6:10pm	Daily
Tinian-Saipan w/ connecting flights to Rota or Guam**			
FRE 102	7:05am	7:15am	Daily
FRE 104	7:50am	8:00am	Daily
FRE 106**	8:20am	8:30am	Daily
FRE 108**	9:00am	9:10am	Daily
FRE 110	10:00am	10:10am	Daily
FRE 112	11:05am	11:15am	Daily
FRE 114	12:00pm	12:10pm	Daily
FRE 116	1:30pm	1:40pm	Daily
FRE 118	2:50pm	3:00pm	Daily
FRE 120**	4:20pm	4:30pm	Daily
FRE 122**	5:00pm	5:10pm	Daily
FRE 124	6:05pm	6:15pm	Daily
FRE 126	6:20pm	6:30pm	Daily

Business

Obama signs huge stimulus, readies foreclosure aid

AP

In this three picture combo, President Barack Obama picks up first pen, left, signs, middle, and jokes about having to use more than one pen to sign the economic stimulus bill during a ceremony in the Museum of Nature and Science in Denver, Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2009.

DENVER (AP)—Racing to reverse the country's economic spiral, President Barack Obama signed the mammoth stimulus package into law Tuesday and readied a new $50 billion foreclosure rescue for legions of Americans who are in danger of losing their homes.

There was no recovery yet for beleaguered automakers, who were back in Washington for more bailout billions. General Motors Corp. said it was closing plants, Chrysler LLC said it was cutting vehicle models and both said they were getting rid of thousands more jobs as they made their restructuring cases for $5 billion more for Chrysler and as much as $16.6 billion more for GM. The United Auto Workers union said it had agreed to tentative concessions that could help Detroit's struggling Big Three.

Anything but reassured, Wall Street dove ever lower. The Dow Jones industrials fell 297.81 points, closing less than a point above their lowest level in five and a half years.

Obama focused on the $787 billion stimulus plan, an ambitious package of federal spending and tax cuts designed to revive the economy and save millions of jobs. Most wage-earners will soon see the first paycheck evidence of tax breaks that will total $400 for individuals and $800 for couples.

The stimulus package was a huge victory for Obama less than one month into his presidency. But he struck a sober tone and lowered expectations for an immediate turnaround in the severe recession that is well into its second year.

"None of this will be easy," he said. "The road to recovery will not be straight. We will make progress, and there may be some slippage along the way."

Still, he declared, "We have begun the essential work of keeping the American dream alive in our time."

Underscoring energy-related investments in the new law, Obama and Vice President Joe Biden traveled to Denver where the president signed it at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science before roughly 250 people including alternative energy business leaders. Earlier, the pair examined solar panels on the museum's roof.

On Wednesday, Obama will outline another big piece of his recovery effort—a $50 billion plan to help stem foreclosures—in Arizona, one of the states hardest hit by the mortgage defaults that are at the center of the nation's economic woes.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner mentioned the housing program last week as he rolled out a wide-ranging financial-sector rescue plan that could send $2 trillion coursing through the financial system. Obama is expected to detail how the administration plans to prod the mortgage industry to do more in modifying the terms of home loans so borrowers have lower monthly payments.

One Democratic official familiar with the plans said they will provide a government subsidy so mortgage companies can rework problem loans and thus make them more affordable for borrowers. Another part will allow homeowners to refinance their mortgages if they owe more than their homes are valued. Still another section would give bankruptcy judges more authority to change mortgages.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid pre-empting the president, said the Obama administration also will use Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to help prevent borrowers from defaulting on their mortgages, and create national standards for loan modifications.

More than 2.3 million homeowners coast-to-coast faced foreclosure proceedings last year, an 81 percent increase from 2007. Analysts say that number could soar as high as 10 million in the coming years, depending on the severity of the recession.

Oil slips below $35 as global markets tumble

HOUSTON (AP)—A new batch of lousy economic news dragged oil prices down nearly 7 percent Tuesday, as signs from across the globe pointed to a prolonged and painful recession.

Light, sweet crude for March delivery fell $2.58 to settle at $34.93 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

A number of other commodities fell hard too as people sought less volatile investments.

"The recession is getting worse in their eyes," said Phil Flynn, an analyst at Alaron Trading Corp. "We've gone from a year when we didn't think we were going to have enough of any commodity to a situation where we're going to end the year with oversupply."

And for the first time in three weeks, retail gasoline prices fell.

Prices at the pump slipped 0.5 cents to $1.960 a gallon, according to auto club AAA, the Oil Price Information Service and Wright Express. Prices are still about 12 cents higher than a month ago but remain $1.054 lower than one year ago at this time.

GM, Chrysler seek more gov't aid, to cut more jobs

DETROIT (AP)—General Motors and Chrysler asked the government for an additional $14 billion in aid, a dramatic acknowledgment that conditions in the U.S. auto industry have grown significantly worse in just two months. GM presented a survival plan that also calls for cutting a total of 47,000 jobs globally and closing five more U.S. factories.

That represents the largest work force reduction announced by a U.S. company in the economic downturn. Chrysler said it will cut 3,000 more jobs and stop producing three vehicle models.

Meanwhile, the United Auto Workers union said it has reached a tentative agreement with Chrysler, GM and Ford Motor Co. on modifications to labor contracts. Such concessions were also a condition of the government bailout.

GM said it could need up to $30 billion from the Treasury Department, up from a previous estimate of $18 billion. That includes $13.4 billion previously allocated and $9.1 billion in new loans. The world's largest automaker said it could run out of money by March without new funds.

GM's request includes a credit line of $7.5 billion to be used if the downturn in the auto industry is more pronounced than expected. But the automaker claimed it could be profitable in two years and fully repay its loans by 2017.

Chrysler LLC requested $5 billion in new loans on top of the $4 billion it received in December. The company had said it might need an extra $3 billion.

Both requests were part of restructuring plans the two automakers owed the government in exchange for earlier loans.

Ford, which borrowed billions from private sources before credit markets tightened, has said it can make it through 2009 without government help.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

China promises to keep exchange rate steady

BEIJING (AP)—China promised Wednesday to keep its exchange rate stable and said it would use part of its $1.95 trillion in foreign currency reserves to boost imports and consumer spending to combat the global financial crisis. Chinese exporters that face plunging sales want the yuan devalued, which would make their goods cheaper abroad. But economists say they see no sign Beijing will take such a step, which could fuel tensions with its trading partners. "We will maintain the basic stability of the renminbi exchange rate at a reasonable and balanced level," a deputy administrator of China's foreign exchange regulator, Deng Xianhong, said at a news conference, referring to the currency by its official name.

Asian stocks tumble as bailout confidence fades

HONG KONG (AP)—Asian stock markets dropped early Wednesday as U.S. markets plummeted toward last year's lows and investors began losing hope that governments can rescue the world's economies from slipping deeper into recession. It marked the region's third day of declines, and followed a sell-off overnight on Wall Street that sent the major benchmarks to within a hair's breadth of their lowest close in more than five years. As President Barack Obama signed America's $787 billion measure to revive the world's largest economy, investors were still faced with a rash of downbeat news about everything form struggling U.S. carmakers to beleaguered banks and slumping business activity. Amid the growing evidence of decay, investors are still waiting for more specifics from policy makers on plans to turn around a flagging world economy.

SEC charges Texas financier with 'massive' fraud

NEW YORK (AP)—The federal government says R. Allen Stanford's investment businesses were too good to be true, and shut his companies down on Tuesday. Two months after Bernard Madoff was accused of running the largest investment fraud in history, Securities and Exchange Commission officials raided the offices of Stanford, a Texas billionaire, and froze the assets of three companies he controls, saying he perpetrated an $8 billion investment fraud. Stanford was accused in civil charges of lying about the safety of investments he sold as "certificates of deposit" and promised unrealistically high rates of return. Regulators also said he faked historical data about other investments which he then used to lure in more investors for the CD products. The fraud's operations allegedly reached as far as the tiny Caribbean island of Antigua, where Stanford was knighted in 2006 and helped sponsor high-stakes cricket matches.

STOCK Portfolio

ASIAN MARKETS

AUSTRALIA	3,366.90 Down 45.30 (-1.33%)
HONG KONG	12,743.24 Down 202.16 (-1.56%)
JAKARTA	1,318.36 Up 0.31 (+0.02%)
TOKYO	7,534.44 Down 111.07 (-1.45%)
K. LUMPUR	893.41 Down 5.12 (-0.53%)
MANILA	1,892.23 Down 7.67 (-0.40%)
SINGAPORE	1,637.15 Down 0.77 (-0.05%)
SEOUL	1,066.70 Down 19.09 (-1.76%)
BANGKOK	437.57 Down 0.65 (-0.15%)

LEADING INDICATORS

DOW	7,552.60 -297.81
S&P	789.17 -63.70
NASDAQ	1,470.66 -63.70

MONEY MARKET

Australian Dollar	1.5587
British Pound	0.7013
Canadian Dollar	1.2610
Chinese Yuan	6.8403
Euro	0.7931
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7554
Indian Rupee	49.8350
Indonesian Rupiah	12,050.0000
Japanese Yen	92.3300
Malaysian Ringgit	3.6565
New Zealand Dollar	1.9569
Philippine Peso	47.8050
Singapore Dollar	1.5281
South Korean Won	1,451.4000
Swiss Franc	1.1674
Taiwan Dollar	34.6195
Thailand Baht	35.3100

In U.S. dollar terms

Source: Associated Press

Nation

ACROSS THE NATION

ICUs see big drop in dangerous staph superbugs

CHICAGO (AP)—A government report says the rate of dangerous staph infections has dropped dramatically in hospital intensive-care units, a rare encouraging sign about a hard-to-treat "superbug." The report involving nearly 600 hospitals is the largest to document a long-term decline in the level of IV tube-related infections of MRSA, a deadly drug-resistant staph germ. The rate of MRSA bloodstream infections connected with intravenous tubes fell almost 50 percent between 1997 and 2007. The decline occurred at most types of intensive care units that reported these infections to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the study period. "We may actually be starting to get a toehold on" these dangerous germs, said Dr. Buddy Creech, a Vanderbilt University infectious disease specialist who was not involved in the research. "That's encouraging." In 1997, there were an estimated 43 MRSA infections for every 100,000 intensive-care patients who spent a day hooked up to one of the these IV tubes. By 2007, that number dropped to just 21.

Animal experts are baffled by chimp attack

STAMFORD,Conn.(AP)—Travis the chimpanzee, a veteran of TV commercials, was the constant companion of a lonely Connecticut widow who fed him steak, lobster and ice cream. He could eat at the table, drink wine from a stemmed glass, use the toilet, and dress and bathe himself. He brushed his teeth with a Water Pik, logged on to a computer to look at photos and channel-surfed television with the remote control. But on Monday, the wild animal in him came out with a vengeance. The 200-pound animal viciously mauled a friend of his owner before being shot to death by police. Investigators are trying to figure out why—whether it was a bout of Lyme disease, a reaction to drugs, or a case of instinct taking over. "It's hard to say what exactly precipitated this behavior," said Colleen McCann, a primatologist at the Bronx Zoo. "At the end of the day, they are not human and you can't always predict their behavior and how they or any other wild animal will respond when they feel threatened."

Burris tried to raise funds for Blagojevich

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP)—U.S. Sen. Roland Burris now acknowledges attempting to raise money for ousted Gov. Rod Blagojevich—an explosive twist in his ever-changing story on how he landed a coveted Senate appointment from the man accused of trying to sell the seat.

Burris made the admission to reporters on Monday, after releasing an affidavit over the weekend saying he had more contact with Blagojevich aides about the Senate seat than he had described under oath to the state House panel that recommended Blagojevich's impeachment. The Democrat also said in the affidavit, but not before the panel, that the governor's brother asked him for fundraising help.

Though Burris insists he never raised money for Blagojevich while the governor was considering whom to appoint to the seat President Barack Obama vacated, the revelation that he had attempted to do so is likely to increase calls for Burris' resignation and an investigation into whether he committed perjury before the panel. Illinois Democrats have forwarded documents related to Burris' testimony to a county prosecutor for review.

AP

In this Dec. 30, 2008, file photo, former Illinois Attorney General Roland Burris addresses the media in Chicago after being appointed by Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, left, to fill President Barack Obama's U.S. Senate seat.

Burris would not answer questions Tuesday in Peoria about his attempts to raise funds for Blagojevich, but said he didn't do anything wrong and encouraged officials to look into the matter.

"I welcome the opportunity to go before any and all investigative bodies, including those referred by Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and the Senate ethics committee to answer any questions they have," he told reporters Tuesday.

Burris also said he planned to release later this week "a concise document" related to his testimony, but he would not elaborate.

After an event Monday night in Peoria, Burris told reporters that he had reached out to friends after Blagojevich's brother, Robert, called him before President Barack Obama's election asking him to raise $10,000 or $15,000 for the governor.

"So some time shortly after Obama was elected, the brother called," Burris said, according to a transcript posted on the Chicago Tribune's Web site. "And now in the meantime, I'd talked to some people about trying to see if we could put a fundraiser on. Nobody was—they said, 'We aren't giving money to the governor.' And I said, 'OK, you know, I can't tell them what to do with their money.'"

Burris said he left open the possibility that he and his business partner could go to others for money.

He reiterated that he never did end up donating to the governor or holding a fundraiser, and said that he told Robert Blagojevich in a later conversation that he couldn't raise money because he was interested in the Senate seat. Burris, however, had already discussed the Senate seat with aides to the governor, including Robert Blagojevich, before the November election.

Obama OKs about 17,000 more troops for Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (AP)—President Barack Obama approved adding some 17,000 U.S. troops for the flagging war in Afghanistan, his first significant move to change the course of a conflict that his closest military advisers have warned the United States is not winning. "This increase is necessary to stabilize a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which has not received the strategic attention, direction and resources it urgently requires," Obama said in a statement.

That was an implicit slap at his predecessor, George W. Bush, whom Obama has accused of slighting urgent national security needs in Afghanistan in favor of war in Iraq.

The White House said the new commander in chief would send a Marine brigade and one additional Army brigade to Afghanistan this spring and summer. About 8,000 Marines are expected to go first, followed by about 9,000 Army troops. The United States has slightly more than 30,000 troops in the country now.

The new troops represent the first installment on a larger influx of U.S. forces widely expected this year. Obama's move would put several thousand troops in place in time for the increase in fighting that usually occurs with warmer weather and ahead of national elections in August.

The additional forces partly answer a standing request from the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David McKiernan, who has sought as many as 30,000 additional U.S. troops to counter the resurgence of the Taliban militants and protect Afghan civilians.

"There is no more solemn duty as president than the decision to deploy our armed forces into harm's way," Obama said. "I do it today mindful that the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan demands urgent attention and swift action."

Crash probe focusing on weather, crew's training

CLARENCE, N.Y. (AP)—The man at the controls of a turboprop plane that pitched like a kite before crashing into a house last week had spent only 110 hours flying that model, and investigators said Tuesday they would look into the quality and quantity of his training.

The pilot of Continental Connection Flight 3407 apparently ignored federal recommendations not to fly on autopilot as ice was building on his plane, though investigators so far say he violated no rules.

Whether Capt. Marvin Renslow did all he could to prevent potentially disastrous ice buildup or shake it from his plane remains to be seen. But experts pointed out Tuesday that he had flown thousands of hours in a similar plane, which would have prepared him for icing on his aircraft.

The actions and even the lives of Renslow, 47, of Tampa, Fla., and the first officer, Rebecca Lynne Shaw, 24, of Seattle, are under close scrutiny as the National Transportation Safety Board tries to piece together how a routine flight went fatally wrong in its last 26 seconds.

The NTSB will look into the type of training they received, how they performed, how many hours they flew in the seven days before the crash, how much rest they had and what they did in the 72 hours before the accident, said board member Steve Chealander. That includes a look at whether they drank any alcohol or took drugs, a routine question after any crash.

Another NTSB investigator left in Buffalo will focus on any role the wintry weather had. Other investigators stayed in Buffalo to interview pilots who had recently flown with Renslow and Shaw; many fly regularly into the area.

Muslim TV exec accused of beheading wife in NY

AP

In this photo made available by Bridges TV, Muzzammil Hassan, and his wife Aasiya Hassan of Orchard Park, NY, near Buffalo, pose in an undated photo.

ORCHARD PARK,N.Y.(AP)—The crime drips with brutal irony: a woman decapitated, allegedly by her estranged husband, in the offices of the television network the couple founded with the hope of countering Muslim stereotypes.

Muzzammil "Mo" Hassan is accused of beheading his wife last week, days after she filed for divorce. Authorities have not discussed the role religion or culture might have played, but the slaying gave rise to speculation that it was the sort of "honor killing" more common in countries half a world away, including the couple's native Pakistan.

Funeral services for Aasiya Hassan, 37, were Tuesday. Her 44-year-old husband is scheduled to appear for a felony hearing Wednesday.

The Hassans lived in Orchard Park—a well-off Buffalo suburb that hadn't seen a homicide since 1986—and started Bridges TV there in 2004 with the message of developing understanding between North America and the Middle East and South Asia. The network, available across the U.S. and Canada, was believed to be the first English-language cable station aimed at the rapidly growing Muslim demographic.

Orchard Park Police Chief Andrew Benz said his officers had responded to domestic incidents involving the couple, most recently Feb. 6, the day Mo Hassan was served with the divorce papers and an order of protection.

Asia

RP peace deal seen as unlikely

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Muslim rebels are unlikely to forge a peace pact in her remaining 16 months in office but should strive to end seven months of fighting that have killed about 200 people, the International Crisis Group said Tuesday.

The clashes that broke out between government troops and the 11,600-strong Moro Islamic Liberation Front last August in the country's south have displaced thousands of people and are impeding Malaysian-brokered peace talks and efforts to rid the region of foreign Islamic radicals, the Brussels-based security think tank said.

"No settlement is likely during the remaining tenure of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo," the ICG wrote in its latest analysis. "The two sides are too far apart, the potential spoilers too numerous, and the political will too weak."

Presidential adviser Avelino Razon remained optimistic, saying "it's never too late to negotiate for peace. Any delay will mean more suffering."

Rebel negotiator Mohagher Iqbal agreed that the prospect of a peace accord being forged under Arroyo "was very nil," adding "the obstacles that derailed the talks are still there."

Negotiations between the government and the rebels fell apart in August when the Supreme Court blocked the signing of a preliminary accord that would have expanded a Muslim autonomous region in southern Mindanao region, where a Muslim separatist war has raged for decades.

AP

Filipino Muslims hold placards next to the barbed-wire barricade during a rally near the presidential palace in Manila Wednesday Feb. 18, 2009 to urge the Philippine government to resume the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which was suspended late last year.

The accord had been challenged by Christian politicians who feared they would lose land, power and clout to minority-Muslims.

As a result, a bloody rampage was unleashed in predominantly Christian communities in August, provoking a major military offensive that displaced more than half a million people. The clashes have eased to sporadic fighting, but more than 300,000 villagers have refused to return to their homes and farms, officials said.

Army troops clashed with about 50 Muslim rebels Tuesday in a village in southern Maguindanao province, but there were no immediate reports of casualties, army Col. Marlou Salazar said.

The soldiers went to the abandoned village in Datu Piang township to see if displaced residents who fled the fighting months ago could return, but troops stumbled upon the rebels instead, Salazar said.

US, North Korea trade barbs as Clinton visits Asia

TOKYO (AP)—Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton talked tough on her first overseas trip as America's top diplomat, delivering a sharp warning to North Korea on Tuesday over its threat to conduct a missile test.

As she wound down a long day of official events in Tokyo before preparing for the next leg of her Asia tour in Indonesia, Clinton said North Korea's threatened missile test would harm its prospects for improved relations with the United States and other neighbors.

"The possible missile launch that North Korea is talking about would be very unhelpful in moving our relationship forward," she said, adding that if Pyongyang wants to end its isolation, it would have to act on pledges made to previous Bush administration negotiators to scale back its nuclear weapons efforts.

"The decision as to whether North Korea will cooperate in the six-party talks, end provocative language and actions is up to them and we are watching very closely," Clinton said, referring to North Korea's continuing talks with the U.S. and four other major nations over efforts to nudge the North to abandon nuclear weapons.

Clinton's first day of talks with Japanese officials to reaffirm the U.S.-Japan alliance was overshadowed by North Korea's rhetoric. Japan, too, is concerned about North Korean intentions, and its diplomats, along with envoys from the U.S., China, Russia and South Korea, have been involved in the six-nation talks that were to resume later this week in Moscow.

"If North Korea abides by the obligations it has already entered into and verifiably and completely eliminates its nuclear program, then there will be a reciprocal response certainly from the United States," Clinton said in Tokyo. "It is truly up to the North Koreans."

The U.S. response would include a chance to normalize relations with the United States, formally ending the 1950-53 Korean War with a peace treaty to replace the current armistice, as well as energy, financial and humanitarian assistance, she said.

NATO cautions Pakistan over truce with Taliban

MINGORA, Pakistan (AP)—NATO led a growing chorus of international concern Tuesday by warning that a truce between the government of Pakistan and Taliban militants in a restive region near the Afghan border risks giving the extremists a "safe haven."

A hard-line cleric sent to the battle-scarred Swat Valley to negotiate with the Taliban received a hero's welcome there by crowds shouting "Long live Islam! Long live peace!"

The cleric, Sufi Muhammad, expressed hope the militants would give up their arms to honor the pact, which imposes Islamic law and suspends a military offensive in the former tourist haven and nearby areas.

NATO has 55,000 troops in Afghanistan, and many face attacks by Taliban and al-Qaida fighters believed to find refuge in pockets of Pakistan's northwest.

In the last few months, Swat has largely fallen to militants who have beheaded opponents, burned scores of girls' schools and banned many forms of entertainment. Gunbattles between security forces and militants have killed hundreds, while up to a third of the valley's 1.5 million people have fled.

The truce "is certainly reason for concern," NATO spokesman James Appathurai said in Brussels. "We should all be concerned by a situation in which extremists would have a safe haven. Without doubting the good faith of the Pakistani government, it is clear that the region is suffering very badly from extremists and we would not want it to get worse."

Britain also weighed in with reservations.

"Previous peace deals have not provided a comprehensive and long-term solution to Swat's problems," the British High Commission in Islamabad said. "We need to be confident that they will end violence—not create space for further violence."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in Japan that the agreement still needed to be "thoroughly understood."

A senior U.S. Defense Department official, however, said "it is hard to view this as anything other than a negative development." He requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of relations with Pakistan and because he was not authorized to speak on the record.

UN says Afghan civilian deaths jumped 40 pct.

KABUL (AP)—The number of civilians killed in Afghanistan's worsening conflict jumped 40 percent to a new high last year, and more than half of the deaths were inflicted by Taliban insurgents and other militants, the United Nations said Tuesday.

The report said insurgents increasingly use roadside bombs, car bombs and suicide bombers in attacks that are "undertaken regardless of the impact on civilians." In the latest such attack, the U.S. military reported a roadside bomb killed five civilians Monday in Kandahar province.

Two of the worst civilian tolls from insurgent attacks came in a February suicide bombing at a dog fight in Kandahar that the U.N. said killed 67 civilians and a car bombing at the Indian Embassy last July that killed 55 civilians.

Commanders of U.S. and other international troops in Afghanistan have long sought to emphasize how militant attacks kill far more civilians than the soldiers or officials targeted.

The U.N. said a record 2,118 civilians died from violence last year, up from 1,523 the previous year.

Its report blamed insurgent attacks for 55 percent of the deaths—1,160, compared to 700 in 2007. It said U.S., NATO and Afghan government forces accounted for 39 percent of those killed—828, compared to 629 in 2007. No responsibility was determined for the remaining 130 deaths.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Japan finance chief quits over alleged drunkenness

TOKYO (AP)—Japan's finance minister resigned in disgrace Tuesday after slurring his speech and nodding off during the G-7 summit in Rome last weekend in yet another political distraction as the world's No. 2 economy battles an ever-deepening recession. Finance Minister Shoichi Nakagawa denied he was drunk on the job and blamed his bizarre behavior at a press conference in Italy on cold medicine and jet lag, but friends and foes alike weren't buying his excuse. It was the latest blow to the beleaguered government of Prime Minister Taro Aso, whose support ratings fell into the single digits in a recent poll, increasing speculation his days might be numbered. Opposition lawmakers lodged a censure motion against Nakagawa after he returned to Tokyo and demanded he quit immediately. "He embarrassed himself in front of the world," said opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa. Fellow Cabinet member Seiko Noda called the incident "shocking."

Khmer Rouge genocide trial opens in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP)—The former head of a prison where thousands of Cambodians were tortured then killed for opposing the Khmer Rouge expressed remorse for his deeds as a genocide tribunal got under way on Tuesday. Kaing Guek Eav—better known as Duch—is charged with crimes against humanity. He is the first of five defendants who belonged to a close-knit, ultra-communist regime that turned Cambodia into a vast slave labor camp and charnel house in which 1.7 million or more people died of starvation, disease and execution. Duch oversaw the S-21 prison in the capital Phnom Penh—previously a school, now the Tuol Sleng genocide museum—through whose gates some 16,000 men, women and children passed. Only a handful survived.

Evangelical church leaders detained in China

BEIJING (AP)—Police raided a private evangelical seminar in central China and detained more than 60 worshippers, with four of them still in custody a week after the roundup, a U.S.-based Christian group said Wednesday. More than 30 police office broke into the gathering Feb. 11 in Nanyang city in central Henan province, the China Aid Association said in a statement. China's communist government allows worship only in state-supervised churches, which claim about 11 million members. Christians and clergy in unofficial churches are regularly harassed and detained. The participants came from four provinces for the event at which two South Korean pastors had been invited to speak, China Aid said. The Christians were escorted to a hotel in Nanyang by police, where their personal belongings were taken. They were registered, fined and released, the group said. It was not clear how much they had to pay.

World

Drug gangs drive off cops, terrorize Mexican town

VILLA AHUMADA, Mexico (AP)—For people caught inside Mexico's drug corridors, life is about keeping your head down and watching your back, especially when the sun dips behind the cactus-studded horizon.

No town knows this better than Villa Ahumada, where the entire police force quit after 70 cartel hit men roared through last spring, killing the police chief, two officers and three townspeople.

Residents were left defenseless again last week when gunmen returned and kidnapped nine people, despite the soldiers manning checkpoints far outside town.

"This was a mellow town where we would walk along main street at night. But now we're too scared to even go out," said Zaida de Santiago.

For this lanky 14-year-old, everything changed last May 17. She was dancing at a neighbor's ranch when gunfire shattered the night. The party's hosts turned off the lights and silenced the music. The guests stood frozen, ears trained to the sound of automatic weapons as the gunmen raced down gravel streets in their SUVs.

When the sun rose hours later, the party guests learned that armed cartel commandos had killed the police chief and five others. Soon after, the rest of the 20-member force quit in fear.

AP

A man walks down the streets of Villa Ahumada, on the Mexican border with the US, Monday, Feb. 16, 2009.

"That day will always remain burned in my mind," Santiago said.

Federal investigators say Villa Ahumada is a key stop along one of Mexico's busiest drug smuggling routes, where the Sinaloa cartel has been challenging the Juarez gang for control. The military staffs checkpoints miles outside town, and soldiers and federal police roll through each day, but residents are largely left on their own.

Sliced by a railroad and the Pan-American Highway heading straight to the U.S. border, the town is one of many outposts across Mexico—many of them too small to appear on maps—that cartels need to dominate in order to ensure passage of their U.S.-bound loads of marijuana and cocaine. The town of 15,000 is about 80 miles south of El Paso, Texas.

"In the small towns, the narcos want to have an open sesame," said George Grayson, a Mexico expert at the College of William & Mary in Virginia. "They want to be able to pass through as they see fit, and they've got the muscle to enforce that, but it's unfortunate for the residents. This is where you've got enclaves of failure."

Cartels treat these towns as fiefdoms—in some communities, everyone from the furniture owner to the barman to local officials pay a kind of tax to the gunslingers, border expert Victor Clark said. The extortion not only gives gangs an extra income, it also makes clear who's boss.

"In land occupied by organized crime, society's rules are completely altered," said Clark, a lecturer at San Diego State University who has studied one such town in the Mexican state of Baja California. "This is their territory, and you pay them for protection, or they will kill you."

Villa Ahumada has been without a city police force since May, unable to find anyone brave enough to take the job. Even Mayor Fidel Chavez fled for a time to the state capital, Chihuahua City, last year. After the army and state police pledged to have more of a presence in town, he returned and put 10 residents in charge of reporting suspicious activities to the authorities.

Israel considering prisoner release for soldier

JERUSALEM (AP)—Israel's Security Cabinet will consider a possible prisoner exchange with Hamas, freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners for a soldier captured in June 2007, an Israeli official said Tuesday.

The top-level meeting is set for Wednesday, said government spokesman Mark Regev. He said a decision also was expected on terms of a long-term truce in Gaza after Israel's bruising offensive there last month.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert repeated his new condition that the soldier, Sgt. Gilad Schalit, must be freed.

"We will negotiate his release first, and only then will we be willing to discuss things like the Gaza crossings and rebuilding the (Gaza) Strip," Olmert said during a tour of Jerusalem. Israel and Egypt clamped a blockade on Gaza after Hamas overran the crowded sliver of territory in 2007, allowing in only humanitarian supplies.

In Damascus, exiled Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal complained about Olmert's new condition.

"There can be no truce unless the (Gaza) blockade is lifted and the crossings are opened. The truce issue should not be linked to the issue of prisoner Schalit," Mashaal told reporters in Damascus after meeting with Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa.

Olmert indicated that negotiations might take weeks. His term will end soon, when a new prime minister takes over. "Even if Schalit's case cannot be resolved while I am in office, the foundations we built will facilitate in his release," he said.

Last week's Israeli election ended inconclusively. Israel's president will start consultations with political parties Wednesday, beginning a period of up to seven weeks toward formation of a new government.

Old Europe reaches out to new Iraq

BAGHDAD (AP)—Old Europe is reaching out to the new Iraq.

Germany's foreign minister met Tuesday with Iraqi leaders in the latest high-level visit by a major Western nation that refused to take part in the 2003 U.S.-led invasion but is now looking for ties and lucrative contracts.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the first German foreign minister to come to Iraq in more than 20 years, arrived one week after Nicolas Sarkozy visited Baghdad, the French president calling on other European countries to follow his lead "to support the peace."

Iraqi leaders seem eager to cement their relations with Germany and France partly to avoid the appearance of being puppets of the United States—which at any rate is preparing to withdraw its troops, many of whom worked on infrastructure projects such as rebuilding bridges and roads.

Steinmeier, who met with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and other senior officials, told reporters that Germany wants to "extend a hand to the new Iraq."

"We have seen in the last months important successes in stabilizing the country," he said. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said the visit showed both countries were eager to resume their "historical relations."

"We believe that the situation in Iraq has reached a good phase, and thus there is international confidence in the stability of this country," Zebari told reporters after his talks with Steinmeier.

Those upbeat comments were a far cry from the acrimony of six years ago, when France and Germany spearheaded opposition to the U.S.-led invasion, dividing Europe and damaging relations between Washington and some of its closest European allies.

Ex-Gitmo inmate turned Qaida commander surrenders

SAN'A, Yemen (AP)—A former Guantanamo detainee who later became an al-Qaida field commander has surrendered and was handed over Tuesday to Saudi authorities.

Abu al-Hareth Muhammad al-Oufi was one of two Saudis released from Guantanamo who re-emerged as al-Qaida operatives in a militant video released a day after President Barack Obama signed an executive order to close the prison within a year.

In the video, al-Oufi wore a camouflage shirt with a leather bandolier of bullets draped over shoulder and threatened the United States.

"In the end, we say to the countries of the cross that are garrisoned on the land of (Saudi Arabia) and which support the crusader war against Muslims: By Allah, we are coming. By Allah, we are coming," he said.

Al-Oufi was detainee number 333 at Guantanamo, and he was released in 2007.

In the video, he said he went to Yemen after completing the Saudi government's rehabilitation program for former Guantanamo inmates and other militants.

WORLD BRIEFS

Cruise ship carrying 105 aground in Antarctica

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP)—A cruise ship with 64 passengers and 41 crew members aboard ran aground near an Argentine base in Antarctica on Tuesday, but there were no risks to the people aboard, the Argentine navy and the ship's operator reported. The Bahaman-flagged Ocean Nova ran aground about one mile (two kilometers) from the San Martin base, pushed by "extremely high winds" into craggy rocks, Quark Expeditions president Patrick Shaw told The Associated Press. The Norwalk, Connecticut, company that operates the 240-foot long (73-meter) Danish-built ship said in a news release that "an initial assessment of damage indicated that there was no imminent danger and no threat to lives." "There is no sign of leakage of any kind from the vessel," the company added. Among the passengers and crew were 21 Americans, 18 Filipinos, 17 Britons, seven Canadians, seven Australians, four Germans, five Irish, five South Africans, three Dutch, three New Zealanders, three Danish, two Argentines and one each from Switzerland, Romania, the Ukraine, Panama, Guatemala, Colombia, Russia, Indonesia and Honduras.

Guadeloupe strikers block roads, close airport

BASSE-TERRE, Guadeloupe (AP)—The French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe was on the verge of rebellion, a political leader said Tuesday after stone-throwing protesters set cars and buildings ablaze, forced the international airport to close and clashed with police. Nearly four weeks of work stoppages and demonstrations for lower prices and higher pay have caused thousands of tourists to flee or cancel holidays on the normally tranquil island, prompting many hotels to close and cruise ships to head elsewhere. "It is a political crisis, an institutional crisis and we are on the brink of sedition," Guadeloupe's Regional Council President Victorin Lurel told France-Info radio. From Paris, France's Interior Minister Michele Alliot-Marie said the protests had caused "degradation, devastation and confrontations" on Guadeloupe and its sister island, Martinique, where most shops and offices have been closed by the protests.

Dubai says Israeli rejected for security fears

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—Security worries led authorities to bar an Israeli woman from playing in a Dubai tennis tournament, organizers said Tuesday as a new showdown loomed between the Emirates' hunger for big-time sports events and its stance on Mideast political tensions. The statement from the Dubai Tennis Championships—citing fan anger over Israel's recent military offensive in the Gaza Strip—was its first detailed defense since a visa was denied at the last minute for Shahar Peer, the 48th-ranked women's player in the world. But it also raised the potential for further uproar, since Israeli doubles player Andy Ram is seeking to compete in the men's rounds next week. The overseers of world tennis tours seemed determined not to ease up in their outage at the United Arab Emirates over the snub of Peer just before the tournament began Sunday. The Association of Tennis Professionals, which runs the men's tour, said the UAE must "make the right decision." The Women's Tennis Association warned that the fallout could include dropping Dubai from its calendar.

Environment

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

This picture shows the control sample, which was sprayed with plain water.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

This picture shows the different samples, each one sprayed with different kinds of household chemicals and liquids.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Some of the samples begin to show signs of being affected by the sprays being used.

San Vicente scores high at PSS Islandwide Science Fair

By VANESSA GRAMLICH
SPECIAL TO THE SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Three SVES Canaries took home honors at the PSS Islandwide Science Fair. I earned first place in the 4th and 5th Grade Life Science. Gayatri Nandwani's Hydroponics project got the second place ribbon in the 6th and 7th Grade Life Science category and Kay Sandra Cepeda took home the third place honors for 2nd and 3rd Grade Physical Science category.

The name of my project was "Attack of the Killer Vine!" I decided to do my project one day when we were driving home from the beach. I told my dad that a tree on the side of the road looked like a monster. He told me that the tree was covered with a terrible vine that was taking over the island. He said it will kill the trees because the vine blocks the sun.

"Why don't they kill it?" I asked. He said that it is hard to kill. He heard that scientists released a caterpillar that eats the vine, but a typhoon wiped out the caterpillars. I asked if they could cut it down but he said it grows back stronger. "Can we spray it?" I asked. He told me weed killer is expensive and they would have to spray from airplanes. "Isn't there something we can do to save our trees?" I asked. So I thought we could spray it near the ground. Maybe something cheap will kill it. We could all cut it down around our house or land, let it start to grow back and spray it with stuff from our house. So that's how my project started.

Gramlich

The problem I was trying to find an answer to was this: What common household liquids, when sprayed on Ivy Gourd Vine, will harm it the most? But first I had to find out more about this terrible vine.

From my research, I learned that Ivy Gourd (*Coccina grandis*) is an aggressive vine in the same family as cucumbers. It is eaten in Southeast Asia and probably came from there. It is believed a farmer brought it to Saipan in the late 1980s. By 1997 it had spread to all areas on Saipan. It kills whole forests by completely covering the trees like a giant blanket so they get no sunlight for photosynthesis. The trees and the plants under the trees die. We will lose many valuable medicinal plants that grow in the jungles. Then the trees rot until they fall down. This vine is killing our forests, destroying animals' habitats, and ruining our scenic views.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

San Vicente Elementary School student Vanessa Gramlich meets the "Killer Vine."

So with the help of the SVES Aquaculture Project I designed an experiment. Here's how it worked:

PROCEDURE:

1. Find a suitable sample area to test. This site should include a group of vines that are all growing out of the same soil and receiving the same amount of sun and rain. The vines should all be healthy and within spraying reach.

2. Tape off one area for each spray treatment plus one for plain drinking water, the control.

3. Prepare they sprays. Put each liquid in a labeled spray bottle if it is not already. (See materials for the sprays I used)

4. Spray the samples on the correct vines. Make sure to use the same amount of each sample. Leaves should be wet on both sides. Do not overspray. If vines are rained on, repeat the next day.

5. Record observations daily using a camera and notebook. Look for wilting, changes in color, spots, dying leaves etc.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The sample that was sprayed with salt water before the start of the experiment.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The sample that is sprayed with salt water has lots of dead leaves.

Aquaculture Science and Self-Reliance

The Inetnon Amot Natibu/Ammwelil Safeyal Faluwasch is the partnering organization that will assist the San Vicente Elementary School students in learning about native medicines and the culture of the native medicine men and women. Last week's article mistakenly referred to them as the "Native Medical Association" as the English translation. The correct translation is Native Medicine Association. We sincerely apologize for the mistake. A goal of the Aquaculture Science and Self-reliance project is to find ways to save the endangered native plants, including medicinal plants.

MATERIALS:

1. Suitable Vines
2. Camera
3. Labels
4. Treatment Liquids

Treatment 1. Drinking water. This is the control so we know that the leaves get sick from the spray, not just getting wet. We do not expect anything to happen to these vines, but if they get sick, then there must be something else affecting the vines, such as no water or something hurting the roots.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The sample that was sprayed with bleach also shows extensive damage.

Treatment 2. Commercial Weed Killer (Roundup - Premixed Solution). This is sort of a second control. We expect it to kill the vine. It is expensive though, so if another, cheaper spray kills the vine, we can compare costs.

Treatment 3. Vinegar. Use undiluted from the bottle. The active ingredient in vinegar is 5 percent acetic acid.

Treatment 4. Salt Water. I made a saturated sodium chloride solution by mixing salt in water until the salt wouldn't dissolve anymore.

Treatment 5. 100 percent Lime Juice. Lime or lemon juice is sour because it is 5 percent citric acid.

Treatment 6. Bleach. Bleach whitens clothes because it is 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite—a strong basic solution. Bases are the opposite of acids.

Treatment 7. 70 percent Isopropyl Alcohol. This is rubbing alcohol, used to kill germs, not the alcohol that makes you drunk.

Treatment 8. Polyurethane Wood Finish. This is what woodworkers spray on jewelry boxes and things to make them shiny. Maybe it will clog up the leaves.

Treatment 9. Urine. You know what this is. My brother was kind enough to supply this. It has uric acid in it.

Treatment 10. Gasoline. I used regular gas.

CONCLUSION: I found out that bleach and salt water will harm Ivy Gourd Vine the most. They do as good a job of killing leaves as the expensive Commercial Weed Killer. Most of the leaves that were sprayed were dead in a week.

ANALYSIS: I was excited to see that bleach or salt water will kill the leaves. Should we all go out and spray vines with bleach and/or salt water? I don't think so. Bleach and salt are probably not very good for the soil. I am glad that I found everyday things that can hurt the Ivy Gourd vine. I think there should be more research done to try to stop this terrible vine. I just hope that I helped raise awareness in the community about this "killer vine." Our new science equipment should help us learn more about this vine, and maybe one of our or a group of us will be part of the solution to this problem.

Life & Style

AP writers pick 'Slumdog' to win best picture

By DAVID GERMAIN and
CHRISTY LEMIRE
AP MOVIE WRITERS

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Associated Press movie writers David Germain and Christy Lemire would like to agree to disagree more often so they could make fun of each other's Academy Awards picks, but they're in general consensus this time.

Among the top six categories, they diverge only on one: best actor.

Here are their predictions, with both sounding off on best picture and actor, Lemire offering their take on director and supporting actress, and Germain giving their opinion on best actress and supporting actor.

BEST PICTURE

Nominees: "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," "Frost/Nixon," "Milk," "The Reader," "Slumdog Millionaire."

GERMAIN: "Slumdog Millionaire" is a wildly different story than "Trainspotting," one of my favorite modern films, yet both showcase director Danny Boyle's remarkable ability to present equal parts humor and horror on screen and deliver an energy-burst of a movie that people walk away feeling good about.

I confess I doubted the instant best-picture buzz surrounding the movie after it debuted on the film-festival circuit six months ago. I thought it was a terrific film but one whose dark edges—child mutilation, police torture, boys orphaned when their mother is slain before their eyes—would limit its appeal to commercial audiences and Oscar voters alike.

I get paid the big bucks to be wrong. "Slumdog" has steamrolled through awards season, dominating at virtually every Hollywood honor that matters, while steadily climbing toward $100 million hit status.

The movie has four worthy opponents. In some parallel universe where "Slumdog Millionaire" went straight to DVD (as it nearly did in our world), "Frost/Nixon" or "Milk" easily could have emerged as the film to beat. "The Reader" is a high-class drama in every sense, while I admire the technical prowess that went into "Benjamin Button," even though it smothered the story.

But the breathless drive and romance of "Slumdog Millionaire"—with its no-name ensemble and unshakable optimism in the face of terrible hardship—will carry it through to one of the great diamond-in-the-rough triumphs ever at the Oscars.

LEMIRE: It's not the best movie of the year. It didn't even make my top 10 list—my choice for the year's best film, "The Wrestler," sadly is not among the best-picture nominees. But "Slumdog Millionaire" is the unlikely, undeniable juggernaut. And so, after winning every other top prize week after week throughout awards season, "Slumdog" will win the Academy Award for best picture.

What's intriguing about "Slumdog," though, is that it's not the most traditional best-picture pick. Not by a long shot. That would be "Benjamin Button," a huge technical achievement with both sweeping scope and intimate heart. In its own small, vibrant way, though, "Slumdog" is exceptionally well made. It has a great energy about it, an inventive narrative structure and an immediacy that's bracing. And the tone is purely and uniquely Danny Boyle, with its sweetness and squalor existing equally side by side.

Above all else, though, its ultimate uplift is what wins people over. Would "Slumdog" win the Oscar any other year? Maybe not. But maybe it's exactly what we need right now, and that's its lasting appeal.

BEST DIRECTOR

Nominees: David Fincher, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"; Ron Howard, "Frost/Nixon"; Gus Van Sant, "Milk"; Stephen Daldry, "The Reader"; Danny Boyle, "Slumdog Millionaire."

LEMIRE: "Slumdog" wins and Danny Boyle wins. The story, based on the novel "Q&A" by Vikas Swarup, is set in the slums of Mumbai but the result on screen is very much in keeping with the British director's tradition of blending graphic images with unexpected hope. The juggling act the film required—the jumping back and forth in time, the difficult shooting situations, the large (and largely unknown) cast—all paid off with the cohesive and convincing results. You could argue that Fincher's job was tougher and more of an accomplishment in many ways, simply because the virtuoso director pulled off such seamless visual effects throughout an enormous—and some would say overlong—tale. But the embrace of "Slumdog" is so widespread that it would be impossible to separate the filmmaker from the film.

"Frost/Nixon" is probably Howard's strongest work but he's won a best-director Oscar recently for 2001's "A Beautiful Mind." Van Sant managed to make a biopic that's rich and full and never feels like a paint-by-numbers depiction of a famous person's life, but this unfortunately isn't his year. Daldry has made a prestigious picture in "The Reader" but doesn't have a shot against Boyle.

BEST ACTOR

Nominees: Richard Jenkins, "The Visitor"; Frank Langella, "Frost/Nixon"; Sean Penn, "Milk"; Brad Pitt, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"; Mickey Rourke, "The Wrestler."

LEMIRE: Aha, finally the category on which we differ.

I love Rourke in "The Wrestler" but, admittedly, much of the allure of his performance comes from the art-imitating-life nature of it. As physically demanding as the role obviously was, Penn did something more difficult from the inside with the transformation he underwent to play slain gay rights leader Harvey Milk. He deeply loses himself in the part—there's a charm and softness to it that makes you forget you're watching an actor whose off-screen brashness is as well known as his on-screen intensity. And actors, the largest voting bloc in the academy, may find that more impressive than Rourke's moving comeback.

Langella is, of course, completely great as Richard Nixon. He very easily could have lapsed into caricature in playing such a widely parodied figure and he never does, instead presenting a multifaceted portrayal of the disgraced former president. Jenkins is lovely in "The Visitor" and it's about time this veteran character actor gets some recognition, but he won't win for his small gem of a film. Pitt's performance is wide-ranging but "Benjamin Button" is primarily a technical feat. And so, after winning for 2003's "Mystic River," Penn should win the best-actor prize again.

GERMAIN: I never thought I'd say it, but I'm voting for Nixon.

Yes, Penn is enormously deserving as another fallen '70s political leader. His Harvey Milk is arguably the warmest

See AP on Next Page

Oscar nominations

The 81st annual Academy Award nominations were announced Thursday. The presentation will take place Feb. 22.

Best picture:	**"The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," "Frost/Nixon," "Milk," "The Reader," "Slumdog Millionaire."**
Lead actor:	**Richard Jenkins,** "The Visitor"; **Frank Langella,** "Frost /Nixon"; **Sean Penn,** "Milk"; **Brad Pitt,** "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"; **Mickey Rourke,** "The Wrestler."
Lead actress:	**Anne Hathaway,** "Rachel Getting Married"; **Angelina Jolie,** "Changeling"; **Melissa Leo,** "Frozen River"; **Meryle Streep,** "Doubt"; **Kate Winslet,** "The Reader."
Supporting actor:	**Josh Brolin,** "Milk"; **Robert Downey Jr.,** "Tropic Thunder"; **Philip Seymour Hoffman,** "Doubt"; **Heath Ledger,** "The Dark Knight"; **Michael Shannon,** "Revolutionary Road."
Supporting actress:	**Amy Adams,** "Doubt"; **Penelope Cruz,** "Vicky Cristina Barcelona"; **Viola Davis,** "Doubt"; **Taraji P. Henson,** "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"; **Marisa Tomei,** "The Wrestler."

SOURCE: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences AP

AP

Steve Meissner, 47, an assistant to the Academy President, and the official Oscar keeper, finishes unpacking the Oscars at the Academy of Motion Pictures And Sciences headquarters in Beverly Hills, Calif. on Thursday, Feb. 12, 2009.

AP

In this image released by ABC, Hugh Jackman, host of the 81st Academy Awards, is shown on Jan. 28, 2009. Jackman will host the awards show for the first time, Sunday, Feb. 22, 2009 airing at 8:00 p.m. EDT on ABC.

Minutes count for Oscar nominees Davis, Shannon

LOS ANGELES (AP)—For Viola Davis, it may have been her character's shocking admission that she's glad a priest has shown kindness to her troubled son, no matter what the man might have taken from the boy in return.

For Michael Shannon, it may have been his character's savage parting shot, an exclamation to his dissection of a couple's hypocrisy and crumbling marriage.

Sometimes, Academy Awards nominations come down to small but crucial moments, and this season, Davis and Shannon delivered, each landing in the supporting-acting categories with only a couple of scenes and a few minutes of screen time.

With a tiny role in the Roman Catholic drama "Doubt," Davis managed to stand out among lead players Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Amy Adams, who also earned Oscar nominations for much fuller parts.

Shannon ran away with his two scenes in "Revolutionary Road," momentarily co-opting the movie from stars Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio and picking up the film's only acting nomination.

"I was totally shocked," Shannon said of his nomination. "There's so many performances in the movie that I feel are so on the nose. The movie itself was just kind of a dream world for me ... and to see all these amazing actors bring these characters to life, it's hard to believe that I was the one getting singled out. But I'm grateful for it."

The Oscars ceremony will be held Sunday.

Davis and Shannon are the latest in a venerable line of Oscar scene-stealers, actors who score an invite to Hollywood's biggest night by putting across a big performance in a very short amount of time.

About two dozen actors over the last 50 years have grabbed Oscar nominations with less than 10 minutes of screen time, estimates Tom O'Neil, a columnist for the awards Web site TheEnvelope.com.

Some wind up winning, such as Judi Dench as Britain's imperious monarch in 1998's "Shakespeare in Love," Anthony Quinn as artist Paul Gauguin in 1956's "Lust for Life" and Beatrice Straight as a woman fed up with her husband's philandering in 1976's "Network."

A year ago, Ruby Dee had a supporting-actress nomination with less than five minutes on screen in "American Gangster," playing a mother who delivers a sharp wallop to the face of her crime-lord son (Denzel Washington).

AP

In this image released by Miramax Film Corp., Viola Davis is shown in a scene from "Doubt."

In 2005, William Hurt did not show up until the final minutes of "A History of Violence," yet he earned a supporting-actor slot as a crime boss undone in the blink of an eye, locked out of his own house and left patting his pockets for his keys while hell breaks loose inside.

"I think it's all about impact. That one moment, William Hurt fumbling for his keys, the moment Beatrice Straight barks at her cheating husband, `I've had enough!' Judi Dench roaring with defiance as Queen Elizabeth. Ruby Dee hauling off and slapping Denzel," O'Neil said.

As mentally ill mathematician John Givings in "Revolutionary Road," Shannon makes his presence felt from the moment he first encounters DiCaprio and Winslet's Frank and April Wheeler, picking away at the polite facade the tormented couple present to the world.

Givings' last words ring the harshest, though, as he points at the pregnant April's belly and roars: "I'm glad about one thing, though. You know what I'm glad about? I'm glad I'm not gonna be that kid!"

In "Doubt," Davis' Mrs. Miller has a slow build toward her dramatic high-point, quietly deflecting a nun's suspicions that her son may have been abused by a priest (Hoffman) at a Catholic school. As the nun (Streep) presses the matter, Mrs. Miller confesses the trauma her son has endured at his previous school and at home at the hands of a violent father.

"Do I ask the man why he's good to my son? No. I don't care why," she bemoans. "My son needs some man to care about him and to see him through the way he wants to go. I thank God this educated man with some kindness in him wants to do just that."

It's rare for two of the 10 supporting spots to go to actors in tiny roles. The fact that both Davis and Shannon made the cut was a testament to the impact each actor had with just a few choice moments.

"Normally, size matters in Hollywood," O'Neil said, "but not necessarily this year."

AP

From Page 18

character Penn has created (save for party dude Spicoli in "Fast Times at Ridgemont High"). And Penn very well might walk away with his second Oscar.

But Frank Langella has crafted a monumental performance as Richard Nixon, a role he manages without a trace of caricature. His Nixon is everything you imagine the man was—brilliant, fumbling, two-faced, autocratic, terrified, terrifying.

Langella's a greatly respected actor who's won top honors on stage—including a Tony Award for this same part. But he's never had a film role before that puts him in this league, though 2007's "Starting Out in the Evening" could and should have earned him an Oscar nomination.

Now that Langella has one, it's a short step for his peers to seize the opportunity to give him the highest film prize, since you never know when he'll come off the stage and do another movie again.

BEST ACTRESS:

Nominees: Anne Hathaway, "Rachel Getting Married"; Angelina Jolie, "Changeling"; Melissa Leo, "Frozen River"; Meryl Streep, "Doubt"; Kate Winslet, "The Reader."

GERMAIN: Kate Winslet has the Sean Penn thing going. All that finest-actress-of-her-generation talk. Nominated a bunch of times but never won an Oscar. And now she has two films back-to-back ("The Reader" and "Revolutionary Road") that could have gotten her a nomination.

Penn was in the same boat five years ago when he had "21 Grams" and "Mystic River" out, winning best actor for the latter.

But as with Penn, the Winslet back-story amounts to talking points. He deserved to win, and so does she.

As a former Nazi concentration camp guard who truly may not comprehend the wrongs she's done, Winslet is a study in restraint and latent guilt. It's a performance that has Oscar written in the marrow as Winslet takes her character on a decades-long journey from denial and ignorance to enlightenment and agonizing self-examination.

SUPPORTING ACTOR:

Nominees: Josh Brolin, "Milk"; Robert Downey Jr., "Tropic Thunder"; Philip Seymour Hoffman, "Doubt"; Heath Ledger, "The Dark Knight"; Michael Shannon, "Revolutionary Road."

GERMAIN: It would be one of the biggest shockers in Oscar history if Heath Ledger did not win for his final completed role. Everything about "The Dark Knight" raised the bar on the superhero genre, but Ledger's reinvention of Batman adversary the Joker seemed to come from a place of true madness and chaos.

This was not just a comic-book villain; this was an Olympian force of evil whose bad makeup job accentuated the fact that a real demon lurked beneath. Ledger made this repellent madman magnetic, enthralling, even perversely joyous.

The Joker was a force of nature, and as revealed here for the first time in a career that had been spiraling steadily upward, so was Ledger.

The question we'll never be able to answer is whether the raves for his performance would have been quite so strident if Ledger had not died on Oscar nominations day a year ago.

But the amazing buzz on the performance began long before his death, and were Ledger alive today, he'd likely be heading on stage Sunday to collect his Oscar.

If only.

SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Nominees: Amy Adams, "Doubt"; Penelope Cruz, "Vicky Cristina Barcelona"; Viola Davis, "Doubt"; Taraji P. Henson, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"; Marisa Tomei, "The Wrestler."

LEMIRE: The radiant Cruz is a force of nature in "Vicky Cristina Barcelona"—wildly beautiful and selfish, volatile and vulnerable, sexy and funny. She steals her every scene in Woody Allen's Spanish romp—no small feat when you're playing opposite Scarlett Johansson and Javier Bardem. Her performance reinforces what we realized when she was nominated for best-actress two years ago for "Volver"—that Cruz is so much more than just a pretty face, but rather an actress of real fearlessness and versatility.

Tomei allows herself to be just as stripped down—literally and figuratively—and her nomination proves that the supporting-actress Oscar she won for "My Cousin Vinny" was no fluke. Adams brings an engaging softness to the otherwise heavy-handed "Doubt," and Henson provides an understated sweetness to the enormity of "Button."

The only other actress who may have a real shot at beating Cruz is Davis, whose few powerful scenes opposite Streep in "Doubt" give the film a much-needed sense of perspective and complexity. She changes everything in just a few minutes, and considering Judi Dench's win for a brief appearance in "Shakespeare in Love," a win for that kind of performance wouldn't seem unprecedented—or unmerited.

Message of Appreciation

Margarita Cepeda Mendiola Sablan

October 07, 1931 - February 06, 2009

Words cannot express our true feeling of appreciation to all who have reached out to us in any way. Your presence and prayers at the daily Eucharistic Celebration and rosary have comforted us as we mourn the loss of our beloved mother and grandmother. We will keep you in our hearts, thoughts, and most especially our prayers, and may God bless us all.

To all our family and friends who unselfishly offered their assistance, condolences and prayers, we are deeply touched.

Thank you, Si Yu'us Ma'ase

From the Family

‘Slumdog Millionaire’ kid stars face uphill battle

By ERIKA KINETZ
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

MUMBAI, India (AP)—They are not your typical movie stars.

Ten-year-old Azharuddin Mohammed Ismail lives in a lean-to made of tarpaulins and blankets. Nine-year-old Rubina Ali’s home is a tiny bubble-gum pink shack. A murky open sewer runs down her narrow lane.

Plucked from one of Mumbai’s teeming slums to star in the Oscar-nominated hit “Slumdog Millionaire,” they are India’s real slumdog millionaires.

Like the film’s hero, an impoverished tea seller who wins money and love on India’s version of “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,” they now have a chance to escape the grinding poverty they were born into. But as their still-unfolding story shows, things never go as smoothly in real life.

The filmmakers are helping the children, but fast discovering that good intentions and deep pockets don’t guarantee success. Meanwhile, sudden fame and relative fortune are sowing resentment within the families and with neighbors, who wonder why their big-eyed boys weren’t cast instead.

The Oscars will be presented Sunday at Hollywood’s Kodak Theatre. The Fox Searchlight release has grossed more than $100 million, but the children’s lives seem nearly as fragile as before.

“He’s supposed to be the hero in the movie, but look how he’s living,” said Azharuddin’s mother, Shameem Ismail, sitting on a rotting board outside their lean-to. “It’s a zero.”

About 65 million Indians, roughly a quarter of the urban population, live in slums, according to government surveys.

“Most of them are doomed to remain as they are,” said Amitabh Kundu, dean of Jawaharlal Nehru University’s School of Social Sciences in New Delhi.

AP

Rubina Ali Qureshi, 9, left, straddles a blocked drain next to an open area strewn with garbage near her home in a slum in Bandra, suburban Mumbai, India, Sunday, Jan. 25, 2009. Rubina played the youngest version of the leading lady Latika, in the Oscar-nominated film “Slumdog Millionaire”. Slumdog actors Rubina Ali and Azharuddin Mohammed Ismail still live in the Bandra slums.

It’s too early to tell whether Rubina and Azharuddin—Azhar to his friends—will buck the trend.

The filmmakers debated whether to use slum kids at all.

“Part of your brain thinks, would it distort their lives too much?” said Danny Boyle, the British director, by phone from London. “Then someone said, ‘These people have so much prejudice against them in their lives. Why should we be prejudiced against them as well?’”

Rubina was cast as the young Latika, who grows up to become the hero’s love interest, and Azhar as his brother, Salim.

Boyle and producer Christian Colson figured education was the best way to help Rubina and Azhar. They got them places in Aseema, a nonprofit, English-language school for underprivileged kids in Mumbai.

Some arrive at Aseema with matted hair, never having seen a mirror before. Many need counseling. On one blackboard, the lesson of the day read: “I must close my mouth when I eat.”

School chairwoman Dilbur Parakh said half make it through high school, and she tries to find vocational training for the rest.

The filmmakers also paid the children for 30 days of acting work, give the families a small monthly stipend and set up trust funds that Rubina and Azhar can tap once they graduate.

Colson describes the amount in the trust as substantial, but won’t tell anyone how much—not even the parents—for fear of making the kids vulnerable to exploitation.

As the movie’s popularity swelled, the filmmakers’ plan began to fray.

Journalists swarmed the school, forcing Rubina and Azhar to stay home. The families started demanding more, asking for cash and new houses, Colson said.

When the city razed Azhar’s neighborhood, Colson wired the family money for a new home. He doesn’t know what happened to the money, but the family remains camped out in a lean-to.

Most troubling, he said, the parents’ commitment to seeing their kids through school has waned.

So the filmmakers have agreed to buy apartments and allow the families to move in. But they won’t transfer ownership to the parents until Rubina and Azhar finish school at age 18.

The filmmakers have also faced criticism that they didn’t fairly compensate the children, but have declined to reveal how much they paid, again citing fear of exploitation.

“It’s becoming a full-time job dealing with the daily hassle,” Boyle said. Still, he added, “I’m glad we did it, even with all the headache.”

He hopes to give Rubina and Azhar an education rather than a jackpot—what he called a “slow nurturing” instead of “a sudden dash for glory.”

“Moviemaking is distorting,” Boyle said. “The last thing you want to do is turn them into a star.”

But directing movies is easier than directing lives. Stardom is already distorting Rubina’s world.

The latest additions to her family’s meager belongings—some stainless-steel pots and old blankets—are two small photo albums.

Inside are photographs of Rubina wearing a glittering “salwar kameez” outfit and sitting in a helicopter, ready to fly off to a strange new world of red carpets and Bollywood heroes.

“My friends when they see me on TV say, ‘Look, you’re going to be a big actress when you grow up. You’re going to forget us,’” Rubina said. “I say, ‘You are my best friends. How can I forget you?’”

She dashed outside and scurried along the sewer. “See this?” she said, pointing at a tract of weeds. She seemed proud to pronounce a new English word to a foreign visitor: “jungle.”

But on the narrow, dirty lanes Rubina knows best, most kids speak Hindi and Urdu and forgo school to work.

“If I wear something nice then people say how I’m trying to show off, and I normally don’t talk to them in English,” she said.

Azhar’s mom, wrapped in the sparkly pink sari she wore to the movie opening, wonders where all the money the filmmakers promised is.

“I don’t know if I should go ask them if money is coming in,” she said.

Her husband usually brings in 1,500 to 3,000 rupees ($30 to $60) a month selling scrap wood, but now is hospitalized with tuberculosis, Ismail said.

Azhar sat at her elbow, distracted. His friends had been staring at him as he talked with one journalist after another.

“My friends have seen me get new clothes and go in cars and get books,” he said. “Even they want that sort of life.”

He celebrated his birthday recently by buying a cake and balloons for his neighbors.

Now he wanted to buy his friends chocolate, but his mother controlled the purse strings.

Azhar began to cry. Tears ran down his small face.

“It’s my money and you are using it!” he shouted.

“We have 200 rupees,” his mother said. “I’ll give you some later.”

He kept crying, twisting his body in small unhappy thrusts. “You’re not giving me money,” he yelled. “You’re spending it on other things.”

His mother grabbed a piece of brick and raised it over her head.

“Is it your money?” he shouted, daring her: “Hit me. You hit me!”

Then he fled.

Suddenly, school, Bollywood and the upcoming Oscars all seemed terribly irrelevant. There was only the plain dirt Azhar and his mother live on, and the immediate, unruly desire for cash.

Ismail tossed the brick to the ground, rolling her one good eye in exasperation. She can’t see out the other one and says she needs 6,000 rupees ($120) for an operation.

“He’s a star,” she sighed.

Polanski loses court bid but gets another chance

LOS ANGELES (AP)—A judge on Tuesday refused to dismiss a 31-year-old sex case against Roman Polanski because he’s a fugitive but signaled that he would reconsider if the film director returns to the United States and appears in court.

Superior Court Judge Peter Espinoza said that after watching a documentary on the case he agrees there was misconduct by the now-deceased judge who arranged a plea bargain but reneged on it.

Polanski, now 75, pleaded guilty in 1977 to unlawful sexual intercourse with a 13-year-old girl but fled to France in February 1978 after the judge threatened him with more prison time than agreed upon. That judge also said Polanski would have to voluntarily deport himself.

“Having reviewed all the evidence in this case, there was substantial misconduct that occurred in the pendency of this case,” said Espinoza. But he said that if Polanski wants a ruling on that underlying issue, “He just needs to submit to the jurisdiction of this court.”

Espinoza stayed his own decision until May 7 and ordered attorneys to appear in court then.

“If you are anticipating Mr. Polanski’s presence on that date, I would need notice to arrange for security,” Espinoza told Polanski’s lawyer, Chad Hummel. He noted the large turnout of news media at Tuesday’s hearing, even though it had been known that Polanski would not be there.

Hummel asked the judge for “guidance on what would happen if he returns.” He did not get it.

The judge said he was relying on the fugitive disentitlement doctrine, which says that fugitives are not entitled to the processes of the court. In addition, he cited the more than 30-year delay since Polanski fled.

Loyola University law professor Laurie Levenson, who attended the hearing as an observer, said the ruling was anticipated but the judge’s willingness to reconsider was a surprise.

“Without committing himself, the judge said, if you show up it may not be as bad as you think.... The ray of light for Polanski is that the judge says there was misconduct,” Levenson said.

Deputy District Attorney David Wolgren told Espinoza he disputes the misconduct allegations and said it would be a miscarriage of justice to allow Polanski to seek dismissal of his case “from the comforts of France.”

Polanski lives in France, where his film career has continued to flourish. He received a directing Oscar in absentia for the 2002 movie “The Pianist.” While still working in the United States, he directed such classic films as “Chinatown” and “Rosemary’s Baby.”

If he chose to return to the U.S., he likely would be arrested on a fugitive warrant. He has said he has no plans to ever set foot in the U.S. again.

Espinoza said he reviewed not only legal documents filed by both sides but also watched the HBO documentary, “Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired,” which uncovered new information about actions by the late Judge Laurence J. Rittenband.

The documentary suggests behind-the-scenes manipulations by a now-retired prosecutor who was not assigned to the case prodded the judge to renege on his plea agreement. By then, Polanski had spent 42 days in prison in what his lawyers believed was his full sentence under a plea bargain. Rittenband’s decision to add more prison time and require his voluntary deportation prompted him to leave the country.

Lawrence Silver, a lawyer representing the victim, now a 45-year-old woman, argued for dismissal.

“The time has come for this case to end, your honor,” he said.

In another twist on the unusual case, Douglas Dalton, the attorney who represented Polanski in the original case, gave an impassioned argument in which he claimed that Polanski was the victim of “a fugitive Catch-22.”

“Judge Rittenband wanted him out of the country and wanted him never to return. And that’s what Polanski did,” he said. “And now he can’t get any relief because he’s out of the country. It’s the classic Catch-22.”

Marina Zenovich, the filmmaker whose documentary focused new attention on the case, was in court with a camera crew.

Obscure Tolkien book to come out this spring

NEW YORK (AP)—An early, long-unpublished work by J.R.R. Tolkien is coming out.

“The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun,” a thorough reworking in verse of old Norse epics that predates Tolkien’s writing of “The Hobbit” and “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy, will be published in May by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Tolkien

According to Houghton, the book will include an introduction by Tolkien and notes by his son, Christopher Tolkien.

J.R.R. Tolkien, whose fantasy novels have sold millions of copies, died in 1973. “The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun” was written in the 1920s and ‘30s, when the author was teaching at Oxford University.

Danny Gokey wows judges on 'Idol'

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Danny Gokey was proclaimed the "Hero" of "American Idol."

Three of the show's four judges heaped praise on the 28-year-old church music director from Milwaukee on Tuesday, following his rendition of the Mariah Carey tune "Hero" at the end of the Fox singing competition's first show of season eight.

"You are the hero, man," said Kara DioGuardi. "You give us all hope. You were great."

Gokey was the last to perform in a group of 12 singers out of the top 36 semifinalists. The judges directed their harshest criticism at Stephen Fowler, Casey Carlson and Stevie Wright, who Simon Cowell said had "zero" chance of advancing to the next round. The top three vote-getters will be revealed during Wednesday's live episode.

In this image released by Fox, "American Idol" contestant Daniel Gokey is shown.

AP

Michael Jackson auctions awards, albums, art, etc.

LOS ANGELES (AP)—The King of Pop is lightening his load. At an April auction featuring more than 2,000 personal items, Michael Jackson is set to sell his American Music Award for "Thriller," a velvet cape given to him by his children for Father's Day in 1998, a pair of rhinestone-trimmed socks from 1981, a basketball signed by Michael Jordan and his own original artwork.

The 50-year-old singer is also parting with his platinum and gold records, a customized Harley Davidson and a Rolls Royce limousine.

The five-day sale was announced in December by Julien's Auctions, but the full extent of the items available wasn't known until Tuesday, when the auction house released images of the lots. The auction begins April 21.

AP

In this Jan. 17, 2009 file photo, Don Johnson poses for photographers at the Professional Baseball Scouts Foundation's 6th Annual "In the Spirit of the Game" in Los Angeles.

Don Johnson sues over 'Nash Bridges'

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Don Johnson has sued a trio of entertainment companies, claiming he is owed millions in profits from the TV series "Nash Bridges."

Filed Monday in Los Angeles Superior Court, the suit claims Johnson owns half of the copyright to "Nash Bridges" and has not been paid his share of a $150 million syndication deal.

Johnson also claims he has been blocked from developing the six seasons worth of episodes into online videos.

He is suing the now-defunct Rysher Entertainment, 2929 Entertainment—which was founded by Mark Cuban and Todd Wagner—and Qualia Capital. Qualia Capital bought Rysher's catalog from 2929 in 2006, the lawsuit states.

A phone message left for an executive at Qualia Capital was not immediately returned.

Props used by Kovacs part of Dallas auction

DALLAS (AP)—Props used by 1950s television comedian Ernie Kovacs, including a pair of eyeglasses with images of eyes on the lenses, are being sold this weekend by a Dallas collectibles auctioneer.

Kovacs wore the glasses when he was in character as drunken poet Percy Dovetonsils.

The three gorilla masks used in comedy bits involving the "Nairobi Trio" will also be part of the auction online and in Dallas at Heritage Auction Galleries. Doug Norwine, director of music and entertainment at Heritage, said in a news release that the items are consigned by the estate of Kovacs and his late widow, actress and singer Edie Adams.

Adams died in October at 81. Kovacs died in a car accident in 1962 at the age of 42.

Other items in the auction of music and entertainment memorabilia include items consigned by the daughter of "Frankenstein" actor Boris Karloff, Norwine said.

AP

US television presenter Jerry Springer poses with Chicago Showgirls as it is announced he will make his stage debut on June 1, 2009, guest starring as Billy Flynn in the West End musical Chicago, at the Cambridge Theatre in central London, Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2009.

Jerry Springer to star in musical in London

LONDON (AP)—Talk-show host Jerry Springer says he will perform in the musical "Chicago" at London's West End.

He will play the slick lawyer Billy Flynn in the show, which is about glamorous women who murder their lovers for fame.

The 65-year-old television host said Tuesday he will perform the role at the Cambridge Theater in London's West End theater district for six weeks starting in June. He says he will take singing lessons for the role.

Springer hosts "The Jerry Springer Show," which encourages people to reveal intimate secrets on air. A musical about his program, "Jerry Springer: The Opera," opened in London in 2003 and turned into a controversial hit—attracting wide audiences and criticism from religious groups that said it parodied Christian beliefs.

Couples choose to separate church and state in marriage

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

DearAbby

DEAR ABBY: I must respond to the letter from "Deceived in Arizona" (Nov. 30). I agree the couple shouldn't have misled their guests and should have let them know it wouldn't be a state-sanctioned wedding. But these days, many couples choose not to legally wed, and for others it is not a choice.

Most gay and lesbian people do not have the opportunity to have a state-sanctioned marriage, and many progressive couples choose not to legally wed because of unequal marriage laws. Other couples view marriage as oppressive and prefer not to invite the state into their relationship.

Also, some churches will no longer perform state-sanctioned marriages until marriage is available to all couples. If members of those churches decide to be legally married, they must go to the courthouse.

My advice to that stepmother: Get over it! Celebrate the fact that your stepdaughter found her lifelong companion and is happy. And be thankful your new grandchild will have loving, committed parents.

BETHANY IN MINNEAPOLIS

DEAR BETHANY: Thank you for writing. When I printed "Deceived's" letter I had no idea I was catching a hot potato. The mail from readers about this has been most interesting and enlightening. Read on:

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: Oh, boy, did you open a can of worms with that one! Don't you know that many gay people are frustrated with the government's refusal to grant them a legal marriage? And many couples today no longer have any desire to "register" their union with the government, and have decided to forgo the legal benefits associated with it. They stand together to publicly celebrate their joy and commitment to each other. A "government-approved" marriage means far less to them than one affirmed by God, family and community.

ALEXANDRA IN OAKLAND

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: "Deceived," who complained about the marriage ceremony that was "not legal," pointed out the difficulty we have here in the United States where marriage is the only sacrament that is completely entwined with civil law. What we need is separation of church and state.

Governments should allow the CIVIL marriage of any two individuals who want to take on the rights and responsibilities of marriage. Churches should provide a RELIGIOUS marriage to those couples who satisfy their requirements for a religious marriage. That way the government would be out of the religious sacrament business and only in the business of conferring legal rights and responsibilities upon committed couples.

BECKLEY, W.VA., LAWYER

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: You should know that the minister, priest, judge (or whoever) does not "marry" the couple. They only "officiate"—and that's it. In many places around the world people declare in front of family, friends and/or community that they take each other as man and wife—and they are legally married. They do, at some time in the future when the official comes around, go ahead and go through the "formality," but they have already been married all that time before the official shows up.

Depending upon where this couple "pretended they got married," they may very well be married.

Keep up the good work, Abby. You're doing a heck of a good job.

DONALD H., ST. JOSEPH, MO.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR DONALD: Thank you for the kind words. Readers, I'll have more on this tomorrow. It appears "the times may be a-changin'..."

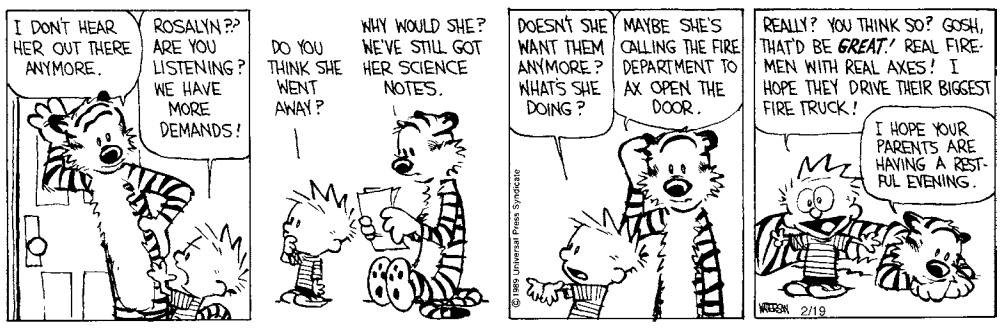
Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Good advice for everyone – teens to seniors—is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for $6 (U.S. funds only) to: Dear Abby—Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


I DON'T HEAR HER OUT THERE ANYMORE.
ROSALYN?? ARE YOU LISTENING? WE HAVE MORE DEMANDS!
DO YOU THINK SHE WENT AWAY?
WHY WOULD SHE? WE'VE STILL GOT HER SCIENCE NOTES.
DOESN'T SHE WANT THEM ANYMORE? WHAT'S SHE DOING?
MAYBE SHE'S CALLING THE FIRE DEPARTMENT TO AX OPEN THE DOOR.
REALLY? YOU THINK SO? GOSH, THAT'D BE GREAT! REAL FIREMEN WITH REAL AXES! I HOPE THEY DRIVE THEIR BIGGEST FIRE TRUCK!
I HOPE YOUR PARENTS ARE HAVING A RESTFUL EVENING.
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WATTERSON 2/19

Garfield®

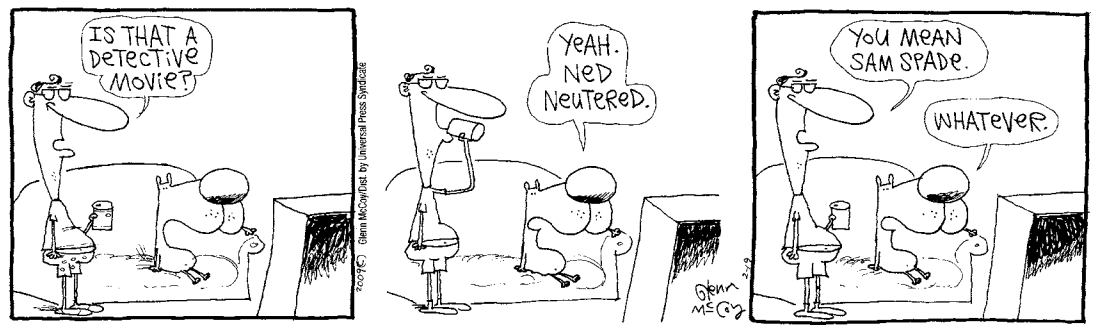
By Jim Davis

Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy


IS THAT A DETECTIVE MOVIE?
YEAH. NED NEUTERED.
YOU MEAN SAM SPADE.
WHATEVER.
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CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Ain't no more
4 Hand warmer
8 Supermarket supply
12 Request
13 Taj Mahal city
14 Send forth
15 Easy field goal
17 Competent
18 Sajak or Summerall
19 Middle kid, in a sitcom
21 Pen VIP
24 Author Buscaglia
25 "I" strain?
26 Wish otherwise
28 Further down the page
32 99 of the 101 Dalmatians
34 Playground game
36 Rebuff a masher
37 Choppers
39 Aries
41 Lemieux milieu
42 Have 44-Across
44 Evening meal
46 Big con
50 — de deux
51 PBS science show
52 Hidden trigger
56 Hebrew month
57 Green land
58 Margery of rhyme
59 Money
60 Encounter
61 CBS logo

DOWN
1 Servicewoman
2 Blond shade
3 Do some pre-bout exercise
4 Get down
5 "Blecch!"
6 Gift-tag word
7 Deadly
8 Signal lights
9 Early pulpit
10 Underwater breathing apparatus?
11 Goblet part
16 Cushion
20 Mainlander's memento
21 Sobbed
22 Malaria symptom
23 Enthusiast
27 Corn spike
29 Opposite result
30 "The Amazing —"
31 Unoriginal one
33 "The Daily Show" host
35 Petrol
38 Meccan pilgrimage
40 Snufflupagus, e.g.
43 Tribe emblem
45 Manhandle
46 Hosiery woe
47 Protuberance
48 Elliptical
49 Soft cheese
53 Rage
54 Comedian Romano
55 Flock member

Solution time: 25 mins.

A	B	A	■	D	O	L	E	■	F	O	A	M
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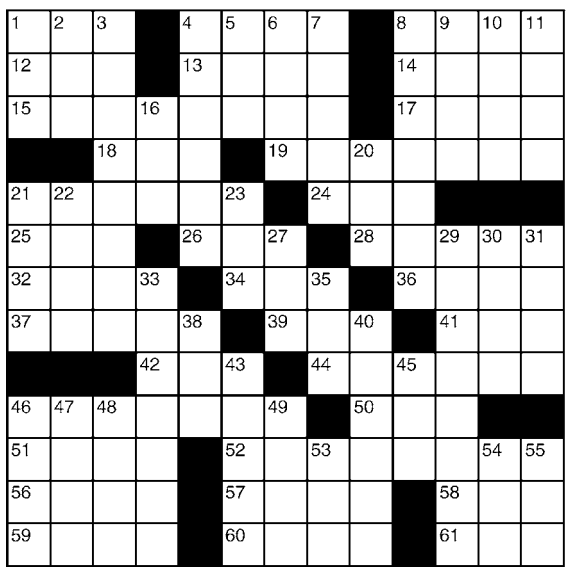
Yesterday's answer 2-19



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Justine Bateman, 43; Seal, 46; Jeff Daniels, 54; Smokey Robinson, 69

Happy Birthday: You have unusual ideas that will help you shoot far beyond anyone's expectations. Use your gifts of compassion and caring to help others find solutions to problems this year. Your strong will power and ability to lead others will help you reach your goals. Your numbers are 5, 11, 18, 23, 31, 43, 47

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Leave your feelings out of any decision you have to make, especially if it concerns people you've known a long time. Don't bend when it comes to your code of ethics or standards. Be brave. ✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): You'll be torn in different directions. Listen to reason and avoid big talkers who are looking out for their interests, not yours. A love affair will not turn out as planned. ✪✪✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): You can come out on top if you do your homework and question someone who is pushy or giving you ultimatums. Take control by using your Gemini finesse and knowledge. ✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): Take better care of your assets, your future and your health. Say no if someone tries to put demands on you. An older, experienced individual will be your guiding light. Listen to the advice being given and you will see your way to victory. ✪✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): You'll have to weed through the conversations, promises and intentions that everyone around you has before you can consider what action to take. Not everyone will be upfront and honest. If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. ✪✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): You can build a strong home base and network system if you are consistent in the way you do things. Someone may use emotional blackmail. Discipline will bring you success and patience will help you stay on top. ✪✪✪✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): You won't want to listen to reason. With everyone looking up to you and so many opportunities to choose from, you aren't likely to consider what someone who has always been there for you has to contribute. Analyze your motives. ✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): Be careful of anyone who is trying to meddle in your affairs. Do not give out information you don't want spread around. You have to be leery of someone you have dealt with in the past who wants to partner up with you now. Don't be afraid to be pushy. ✪✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Mix business with pleasure and you'll not only get ahead, you will develop an interest in someone who can complement your every move. Use your ingenuity to come up with unique ideas. A service that lessens the workload, adds comfort or eases stress will be a winner. ✪✪✪

CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): Money will change hands and deals will close if you are willing to compromise. A last-minute change of plans may surprise you but it will be to your advantage. Rethink any relationship that tends to be negative or holds you back. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): Get involved in projects that interest you and you will meet someone special. The more you interact with others, the better your chance of finding a pastime or job that will lead to a brighter future. Help is but a heartbeat away if you ask. ✪✪✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): Someone may make last minute changes that you aren't aware of. Before signing or promising anything to anyone, check the fine print. Emotional deception is apparent not only from others, but also within yourself. ✪✪

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THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

		1				9		
				4				
3			8	2	7			1
		3				1		
	9	6		8		4	2	
		4				6		
6			7	9	1			2
				3				
		5				8		

Difficulty Level ★★★ 2/19

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's SUDOKU Answer

2	9	8	7	5	1	6	3	4
5	3	4	9	6	8	7	2	1
1	6	7	2	3	4	5	8	9
4	7	9	1	8	2	3	6	5
8	1	5	6	4	3	2	9	7
6	2	3	5	7	9	4	1	8
3	8	2	4	9	5	1	7	6
9	5	6	3	1	7	8	4	2
7	4	1	8	2	6	9	5	3

Difficulty Level ★★★ 2/18

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and **CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD.** The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

MONCTON, NEW BRUNSWICK **Solution: 8 letters**

B	L	U	E	E	R	U	O	J	E	S	U	A	E	B
M	C	N	R	R	D	E	N	W	O	T	G	N	Y	F
A	E	I	T	B	O	U	W	A	O	R	R	T	T	O
E	N	V	T	R	A	B	O	O	I	O	U	O	N	R
I	T	E	L	N	E	N	E	C	T	D	D	N	A	T
N	E	R	U	L	A	B	U	R	E	I	A	I	I	M
O	N	S	M	A	I	L	L	E	T	L	L	N	L	O
H	N	I	B	T	T	B	T	A	B	W	A	E	A	N
P	I	T	E	U	N	Y	C	A	A	T	D	C	S	C
O	A	Y	R	H	T	E	P	Y	I	R	A	T	Ⓨ	K
C	L	E	O	N	N	T	H	O	A	D	T	I	Ⓣ	T
N	L	J	U	S	I	P	N	W	I	E	E	M	Ⓘ	O
A	A	O	U	S	R	A	O	A	B	E	N	D	Ⓒ	N
R	C	S	T	U	L	H	N	O	R	T	H	R	O	P
F	A	R	M	R	E	E	N	I	P	L	A	C	A	M

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Acadian, Agriculture, Albert, Aliant, Antonine, Atlantic, Baptist, Beausejour, Bend, Betts, Bill, Blue, Call, Canadian, Census, Centennial, City, County, Date, Duty, Farm, Fort, Francophonie, Howard, John, LeCoude, Lumber, Macalpine, Maillet, Monckton, Murphy, National, Northrop, Railway, Robert, Russ, Tower, Town, University, Urban, Wood

Yesterday's Answer: Emperor

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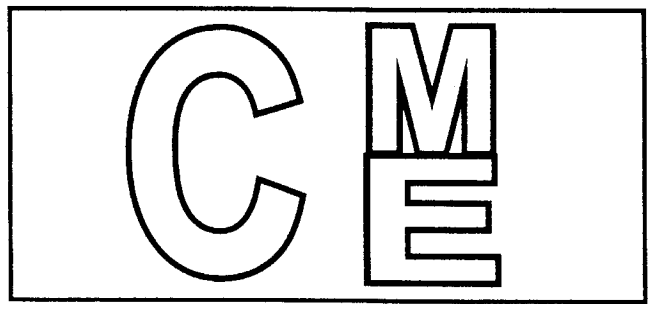

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Howard scores 45 as Magic beat Bobcats in OT

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—Dwight Howard had a career-high 45 points, to go with 19 rebounds and eight blocks, leading the Orlando Magic to a 107-102 overtime victory against the Charlotte Bobcats on Tuesday night.

The Magic got 17 points from Rashard Lewis, who joined Howard on the Eastern Conference All-Star team last weekend.

It was the 18th consecutive double-double for Howard, tying Shaquille O'Neal's franchise record.

J.J. Redick made a 3-pointer with eight seconds left in regulation to tie it and Raymond Felton missed a jumper as time expired.

Boris Diaw made a layup over Howard with 20 seconds remaining and Raja Bell made two free throws for a 95-92 lead before Redick's tying shot.

The Magic took an early lead in overtime, and never let it go. Redick hit a free throw for the 105-102 lead. Courtney Lee added two more to clinch the victory.

Bell and Gerald Wallace returned to the Charlotte lineup. Wallace had been out since Jan 27 with a partially collapsed lung and a fractured rib and Bell had been out since Feb. 6 with a groin strain.

The Bobcats led through most of the final three periods, opting not to double-team Howard around the basket. It allowed them to limit the rest of the Magic until late in the game.

AP

Orlando Magic center Dwight Howard (12) tries to get past Charlotte Bobcats center Emeka Okafor for a shot in the first half of an NBA basketball game in Orlando, Fla., Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2009.

Suns 140, Clippers 100

At Phoenix, Leandro Barbosa scored 24 points and Amare Stoudemire added 23 in Alvin Gentry's debut as the Suns interim coach on Tuesday night.

One day after Gentry replaced Terry Porter, who was fired after a 28-23 start, the Suns wasted little time blowing out the woeful Clippers. Reverting to its favored up-tempo style, Phoenix (29-23) raced to an 81-49 halftime lead—matching a U.S. Airways Center record for points in a half—and coasted from there.

Only the New York Knicks, led by former Suns coach Mike D'Antoni, have scored more points in a half this year—82, against Golden State on Nov. 29, 2008.

Eric Gordon had 24 points for the Clippers.

The Clippers' Zach Randolph was ejected in the first quarter for punching Phoenix's Louis Amundson.

Knicks 112, Spurs 107, OT

At New York, Nate Robinson followed his slam dunk title by showing off his entire game, scoring 32 points and grabbing 10 rebounds.

Robinson made the go-ahead basket in his third straight 30-point game. In the final game before heading to Phoenix to knock off Dwight Howard and win the slam dunk contest, he had 33 points, a career-high 15 assists, nine rebounds and five steals in an overtime loss to the Los Angeles Clippers—the first NBA player with 30 points plus those numbers since Magic Johnson in 1981.

Lakers 96, Hawks 83

At Los Angeles, Pau Gasol had 12 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists for his third career triple-double.

Lamar Odom had 15 points and 20 rebounds, Derek Fisher scored 14 points, and Trevor Ariza and Jordan Farmar added 10 points each on a night when Kobe Bryant scored a season-low 10 points.

All-Star Joe Johnson scored 14 points and Josh Smith added 13 for the Hawks, who had their three-game road winning streak end on the first night of their five-game West Coast trip. Atlanta, fourth in the Eastern Conference standings, had won four of five heading into the break.

Coming off a weekend in which he shared the All-Star MVP trophy with former teammate Shaquille O'Neal, Bryant shot 4-of-12 and never got to the free throw line in his lowest offensive performance since he had 11 against Washington on Jan. 22.

Hornets 100, Thunder 98

At Oklahoma City, Chris Paul drove the lane for a layup with 2.7 seconds left.

Coming off an All-Star weekend to remember, Kevin Durant scored a career-high 47 points and nailed a fallaway 3-pointer from the right wing to tie the game with 13.8 seconds to play. But that left Paul time for the winner in the arena the Hornets called home for two seasons after Hurricane Katrina.

David West led the Hornets with 37 points and 13 rebounds, while Paul finished with 21 points and eight assists.

The game was played hours after New Orleans traded starting center Tyson Chandler to the Thunder for Joe Smith and Chris Wilcox, plus second-round pick DeVon Hardin.

Jeff Green added 24 points and Russell Westbrook scored 12 points for Oklahoma City.

Jazz 117, Grizzlies 99

At Salt Lake City, Andrei Kirilenko returned from an ankle injury to spark a key fourth-quarter run, C.J. Miles scored 24 points and Deron Williams had 20 points and 15 assists.

Kirilenko, who scored 14 points in 18 minutes, had surgery Jan. 30 to remove bone fragments from his injured right ankle and returned a couple weeks ahead of schedule to spark the Jazz, who won the fifth game in their last six and are eighth in the Western Conference.

Clinging to a four-point lead in the fourth quarter, Kirilenko had three baskets, two steals and a block in a game-breaking 20-4 run that put Utah up 110-90 with 3:43 left to play.

Rockets 114, Nets 88

At Houston, Yao Ming had 20 points and 12 rebounds and Shane Battier scored a season-high 19 points.

Von Wafer scored 19 points and Ron Artest added 18 for the Rockets, who outrebounded New Jersey 56-30 and set season highs in 3-point field goals (15) and assists (27) in their sixth straight win over the Nets.

Artest started in place of Tracy McGrady, who sat out for the second straight game and the 19th time this season with an injury. McGrady said just before the All-Star break that he would take an indefinite leave to seek input from doctors on the best course of treatment for his troublesome left knee.

The Rockets improved to 13-6 without McGrady this season.

Vince Carter scored 30 points and Brook Lopez added 21 for the Nets, who have lost three straight after a four-game winning streak.

Bucks 92, Pistons 86

At Auburn Hills, Mich., Richard Jefferson scored 29 points and Ramon Sessions added 17.

The Bucks overcame 24 points and 14 rebounds from Antonio McDyess to pull within two games of Detroit in the Eastern Conference standings.

Malik Allen added a season-high 14 points for Milwaukee, which won its third straight.

Richard Hamilton had 22 points for the Pistons, who have lost four straight and seven of their last eight at home.

Pacers 100, 76ers 91

At Indianapolis, Danny Granger had 20 points and 10 rebounds, and Troy Murphy scored 17 for Indiana, which shot 49 percent from the field.

Andre Iguodala had 20 points and nine assists, Louis Williams scored 17 and Thaddeus Young added 16 points and nine rebounds for Philadelphia, which had its four-game winning streak snapped.

After trailing by 17 early in the fourth quarter, the 76ers got within 89-83 on Iguodala's three-point play with 4 minutes left. The Pacers answered with baskets by Murphy and Granger to push the lead back to 10.

Trade sends New Orleans' Chandler to Oklahoma City

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP)—All-Star point guard Chris Paul could knife his way into the lane, lob the ball up in the air and, almost without fail, Tyson Chandler would be there to slam it down with two hands.

It was the signature move of New Orleans' thrilling young inside-outside tandem, with the two teaming up for more than 100 alley-oops last season during the Hornets' surprising run to the No. 2 seed in the Western Conference and a spot in the conference semifinals.

Now, the Hornets will have to find a new crowd-pleasing calling card.

Chandler was dealt to the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday in a trade that brings veterans Joe Smith and Chris Wilcox to the Hornets and could give New Orleans some cap room next season heading into the first year of Paul's new four-year, $68 million contract. Chandler is due to make about $12 million next season.

"I think it frustrates you to a certain extent. As a coach, you want to win no matter what. That's the bottom line. Your job kind of depends on that obviously," Hornets coach Byron Scott said before the team's game at Oklahoma City on Tuesday night.

"Deals that are made that are money-driven are always tough from a coach's standpoint. I don't think this was so much money-driven. I think obviously there's a lot of owners in this league that don't want to pay luxury tax and things like that. But I do think we got two guys in Chris and Joe that are very, very good quality basketball players."

New Orleans also got the rights to DeVon Hardin, a second-round pick out of California in last year's draft who never signed with Oklahoma City.

General manager Jeff Bower said the Hornets' primary reason for making the trade was that the team wasn't running the floor enough and needed better defensive rebounding to set up transition baskets. Chandler was New Orleans' top rebounder and particularly strong on offensive rebounding, easily leading the team with 112 despite missing 18 games.

"There's no question with this transaction we accomplished some other objectives as well and were able to put ourselves in a position to have greater flexibility down the road and to be in a situation where we have flexibility financially, but it was driven first by the decision that we need to get better, we need to improve. And then it takes you down to, how do you do it and what are your objectives?" Bower said.

Chandler's numbers had dropped off even before he missed the Hornets' last 12 games with a sprained left ankle. He's averaging 8.8 points and 8.3 rebounds this season, after going for 11.8 points and 11.8 rebounds per game last season.

Still, it could be a tough move for Hornets fans to swallow since Chandler was a true starting center and 2008 Olympic alternate while Wilcox and Smith are more natural power forwards who were struggling to find playing time on a team that's been searching for a franchise center for years.

Guard Rasual Butler had a hard time fathoming why the Hornets, who came into Tuesday in sixth place in the West, made the deal.

"It's a little bit of a shock to me. Tyson was a great teammate, a great asset to our team," Butler said. "This is nothing against Wilcox or Joe Smith, but we'll definitely miss Tyson."

Wilcox's averages of 8.4 points and 5.3 rebounds fell off, along with his playing time, since the Thunder signed restricted free agent Nenad Krstic on Dec. 30. He had a season-high 23 points on New Year's Eve, before Krstic got into the rotation, but saw his time on the court fall off to practically nothing within a week. He played in only one of Oklahoma City's last five games.

Smith, the No. 1 pick in the 1995 draft, has been fighting through injury issues of his own. A balky left knee kept him out of the Thunder's lineup for nearly a month before he returned to play in four of the last five games before the All-Star break. He has averaged 6.6 points and 4.5 rebounds in 36 games.

None of the players were at the Ford Center on Tuesday night, and neither team provided a timetable for when they might be ready to play with their new teams.

Chandler, who played one season in Oklahoma City during the Hornets' temporary relocation after Hurricane Katrina, brings the franchise a proven talent inside after it tried for years to draft and develop a front-line center. The former Seattle SuperSonics used first-round picks on Robert Swift, Mouhamed Sene and Johan Petro in recent years and have another 7-footer developing overseas in last year's 20th overall pick, Serge Ibaka.

"It's never easy to find big guys, for sure," Thunder general manager Sam Presti said.

Oklahoma City has been stockpiling draft picks to supplement a young core that includes Rookie of the Year Kevin Durant, Jeff Green and Russell Westbrook.

"I think this move is a strong statement from our ownership group as to their commitment to put an elite basketball operation together, and we're grateful that we have that kind of support from the people that are in charge," Presti said.

Rodriguez says cousin injected him with drugs

AP

In this photo combo, New York Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez speaks to reporters, in a series of three photos, at a news conference at Steinbrenner Field on Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2009 in Tampa, Fla.

TAMPA, Fla. (AP)—Alex Rodriguez read from several sheets of crumpled paper, trying again to explain where he went wrong. "Amateur hour," he called it.

The slugger who might someday become baseball's all-time home run king remembered more details about performance-enhancing drugs Tuesday, saying his cousin repeatedly injected him from 2001-03 with a mysterious substance from the Dominican Republic.

"I didn't think they were steroids," the New York Yankees star said. Later, he admitted, "I knew we weren't taking Tic Tacs."

Making his second public attempt to explain a 2003 positive drug test while with Texas, baseball's highest-paid player described a clumsy scheme in which a cousin persuaded him to use "boli"—a substance he said the cousin obtained without a prescription and without consulting doctors or trainers. Rodriguez said the cousin, whom he wouldn't identify, told him it would cause a "dramatic energy boost."

"It was really amateur hour. I mean, it was two guys," Rodriguez said. "We couldn't ask anyone. We didn't want to ask anyone."

Yet, when asked to explain why the secrecy if he didn't think it was an illegal substance, Rodriguez revealed he had a pretty good idea he was doing wrong.

"Look, for a week here I've been looking at people to blame," he said, "and I keep looking at myself at the end of the day."

Some found his story difficult to accept, even Yankees radio broadcaster Suzyn Waldman.

"Do I believe that Alex Rodriguez, who won't have a Snickers bar or a cookie, let his cousin inject him with something that he didn't know what it was? I find that really hard to believe," she told WCBS radio in New York, the team's flagship station.

Rodriguez's assembled teammates gave him the eye, especially when he turned to them to apologize and offer thanks for their support.

Rodriguez paused for 37 seconds, searching for the right words. He looked side to side, blinked several times, bit his lip and took a sip of water. Only then did he finally look up to face captain Derek Jeter & Co.

"Thank you."

Jeter sat with his arms crossed, joined in the front row by Andy Pettitte, Mariano Rivera and Jorge Posada. More than 20 players in all were there, along with manager Joe Girardi, general manager Brian Cashman and co-chairman Hank Steinbrenner.

Posada left during the question-and-answer session as Rodriguez went into new details. Other players filed out when the news conference ended and quickly went to their cars without speaking with reporters.

"He's a huge investment. So he's an asset, and this is an asset that's currently in crisis," Cashman said. "So we will do everything we can to protect that asset. ... If this is Humpty Dumpty, we've got to put him back together again, to get back up on the wall."

Now 33, Rodriguez used the phrase "young and stupid" three times when referring to himself, "stupid" in two other instances and "pretty naive and pretty young" in another. He twice expressed regret for having gone straight into professional baseball from high school without attending college.

"It's been a very difficult several weeks, and it's been very painful for me and my family, and I'm here to take my medicine," he said.

The three-time AL MVP has spent years denying drug use. He spoke at the Yankees' spring training camp 10 days after Sports Illustrated reported his name was on a list of 104 players who tested positive during baseball's anonymous drug survey. The substances were Primobolan and testosterone, SI reported.

Rodriguez first admitted to using banned substances in an ESPN interview last week. On Tuesday, his account varied during the news conference, in which follow-up questions were not permitted. All questions were cut off after 32 minutes.

At first he said his cousin injected him "twice a month for about six months during the 2001, 2002 and 2003 seasons." Later he said, "That may be once a month, it may be three times a month."

"I'm not sure what the benefit was,'" he said. "When you take any substance or anything, especially in baseball, it's half-mental and half-physical. ... I certainly felt more energy, but it's hard to say, hard to say."

Signed to a $275 million, 10-year contract that has nine seasons left, he is the centerpiece of a team moving into a $1.5 billion Yankee Stadium and expected by many to break Barry Bonds' home run record of 762, after hitting 553 already.

Rodriguez sidestepped whether he thought he had cheated and whether he agreed with commissioner Bud Selig's assessment that he had shamed the sport.

"I've certainly made a mistake, and I feel poorly for that," was as far as he would go.

Asked whether his stats from 2001-03 should be erased, Rodriguez said it's not for him to decide.

"The one thing that, you know, I can lay on my pillow at night is I entered this game when I was 18. I had my best year when I was 20, and then I had my other best year ... in 2007. So, I mean, foul pole to foul pole is pretty good. I understand the questions and the doubt. And I laid my bed, I'm going to have to sit on it."

It wasn't clear what exactly "boli" was. Doping experts said their best guesses were Primobolan, Dianabol or Boldenone.

Mets closer Francisco Rodriguez said substances that are illegal in the United States are easily available over the counter in Latin American countries, such as Venezuela (where K-Rod is from) and the Dominican Republic.

"You have to be careful. But at the same time, you're not stupid. You know what you're going to buy and what you're not going to. It's a reality," he said.

Milton Pinedo, president of the Dominican Federation of Sports Medicine, said Primobolan could not be sold in pharmacies in the Dominican Republic and would have had to have been bought on the black market.

Rodriguez also said that during the early years of his career in Seattle, he had used the stimulant "Ripped Fuel," which contained ephedra. That substance was restricted to prescription sales by the U.S. government in 2004 and classified as a banned drug of abuse by baseball in 2005.

Around the majors, players watched his mid-afternoon news conference at their training camps.

"I wonder if his cousin even existed," Kansas City pitcher John Bale said. "That was my first thought. Is his cousin made up?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't give his name or anything. I can understand he might be trying to protect him," he said.

Girardi said that while Rodriguez had not apologized to him personally during a half-dozen conversations they had in the past 10 days, no apology was needed.

"I saw tears in his eyes. I saw remorse. I think he was disappointed that it's come to this," Girardi said. "And as I said, for him to look and see his teammates—and he didn't have any idea who was going to be here—he was moved."

Cashman said he thought Rodriguez was in enough mental anguish that he would consider him the same as players rehabilitating physical injuries, such as Rivera, Posada and Hideki Matsui.

Said Steinbrenner: "I think the things he needs to focus on are his things that are really important in life: his children and baseball."

"If he can do that, block out this other stuff now and get to playing baseball with the support of his teammates, everything should be fine," he said.

Also in the audience Tuesday was Don Hooton, whose 17-year-old son, Taylor, committed suicide in 2003. Doctors believe Taylor Hooton became depressed after he stopped using steroids. Rodriguez said he hoped to join forces with him and baseball to send an anti-steroid message to kids across the country.

Rodriguez was the third Yankees player in five years to hold a drug-related apology-filled news conference, following Jason Giambi (2005) and Pettitte (last year). Because of his accomplishments and the record he is chasing, questions likely will linger for Rodriguez.

"I may have to answer them for the rest of my career," he said. "The only thing I ask from this group today and the American people is to judge me from this day forward. That's all I can ask for."

Sources: Yankees' Pettitte talked to feds in Clemens probe

WASHINGTON (AP)—Federal prosecutors have interviewed Yankees pitcher Andy Pettitte as they investigate whether his former teammate Roger Clemens lied to Congress when he denied using performance-enhancing drugs.

Two people familiar with the case told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Pettitte was in Washington last week to meet with prosecutors. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation.

The same week prosecutors were talking to Pettitte, they also won a guilty plea from the Houston Astros' All-Star shortstop Miguel Tejada for a misdemeanor count of lying to Congress about steroids in baseball.

Pettitte could be a crucial witness for any case against Clemens. The two trained together for years. Pettitte has acknowledged taking human growth hormone and told congressional investigators that Clemens informed him nearly a decade ago that he used HGH.

Prosecutors are weighing whether to bring perjury charges against Clemens for denying under oath to Congress that he took performance-enhancing substances.

Lawyers for Pettitte declined to comment.

Much of what investigators wanted to know Pettitte had already told Congress.

Word of his recent involvement in the case came as Yankees superstar third baseman Alex Rodriguez answered questions at spring training camp in Florida about his own past use of performance enhancers.

Pettitte, who was at the Rodriguez press conference, was asked later about his meeting with prosecutors. "I can't talk to you about that," Pettitte said.

Around this time last year, Pettitte acknowledged that he might be questioned by the Justice Department.

"I'm just prepared that it might happen," Pettitte said at the time. "There's nothing I can do. Until somebody tells me to go somewhere, I can't do anything."

It was unclear whether Pettitte has been called before a grand jury. Because Pettitte has already given a sworn statement, prosecutors do not necessarily have to use the grand jury to make their case.

Personal trainer Brian McNamee has told federal agents, baseball investigator George Mitchell and a House committee that he injected Clemens more than a dozen times with steroids and human growth hormone from 1998-2001.

Clemens denied it, testifying that he did not use performance-enhancers.

"I have never taken steroids or HGH," the 354-game winner told a congressional committee a year ago.

Pettitte and another former Yankee, Chuck Knoblauch, both acknowledged to Congress that McNamee was correct when he said they used performance-enhancers.

The he-said, he-said nature of the sworn testimony given to Congress by McNamee and Clemens prompted lawmakers to ask the Justice Department to investigate whether the former pitcher lied.

The case was brought before a grand jury after an 11-month FBI investigation.

Clemens last pitched in the major leagues for the New York Yankees in 2007. Pettitte signed a one-year, $5.5 million contract to pitch for the Yankees this year.

Jazy Cup Tour De Marianas set this weekend

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Participants of last year's Jazy Cup Tour De Marianas pass one of Guam's ascents as they find time to smile to the camera.

Bikers will hit the road this weekend for the Saipan stages of the 8th Annual Jazy Cup Tour De Marianas, which is sponsored this year by TakeCare.

Stage 1 will be the individual time trial on Saturday, Feb. 21, with the cyclists covering a distance of 7.5 kilometers from the Marianas Country Club to the Suicide Cliff (Hill Top) for both male and female participants.

There will be six age group categories to be contested in three divisions—Expert Division, Novice Division, and Mountain Bike Division—Junior (17 and below), Open (18-29), Submaster (30-39), Master (40-49), Senior (50-59), and Grandmaster (60 and above).

Stage 2 will be the road race on Sunday, Feb. 22, with a distance of 67 km for the expert and 33.5 km for novice and mountain bike.

Registration forms could be picked up at the Romy Bike Shop/Auto Glass Pro with telephone number 235-9037.

The Top 3 male and female expert overall finishers will win $300, $200, and $100, respectively. They will also receive medals.

The same prizes will be given away to the winners in the two Guam stages to be held March 14-15.

Stage 3 will be the road race on March 14 with the starting and finishing line to be located at the Ace Hardware Yigo via the main thoroughfares of Guam.

Competitors for the expert division will cover a distance of 76 km, while the novice division will have 52 km. Mountain bike riders, meanwhile, need to pedal for 26 km.

Stage 4 will feature the road race on hills and flats on March 14 with the starting and finishing line to be located at the Agana Shopping Center.

The distance for the expert would be 60 km, while the novice and the mountain bike will be 34 km.

Registration forms for the Guam race can be obtained at the Hornet Sporting Goods in Tamuning with telephone numbers 646-9191.

The overall male and female expert champion after the four stages will take home $500, $300, $200, respectively. They will be also awarded their corresponding trophies.

Entry fee for stages 1 and 2 is $35. while the fee for all stages is $60 and the fee for those who opt to pay and race per stage is $25.

Aside from TakeCare as the main sponsor, the other companies supporting the annual event include Tan Holdings Corp., MR Imaging Group, Mair Mair Spade and Thompson, Pacific Islands Club Saipan, Toro Bravo Bike Club, and Jazy Sportswear.

The proceeds will be for the benefit of the Jazy Garcia Sports Foundation.

ATHLETE

From Page 28

The 2008 Female Athlete of the Year was contested by eight athletes.

Swimming and triathlon had the most nominees with three apiece, while football and athletics had one apiece.

Nominees from swimming were Sarah Johnson, Marystar Welch, and Grace Kimball. Triathlon had Mieko Carey, Maimi Shimizu, and Maimi Oshima-Berger. Completing the list were Yvonne Bennett of athletics and Becca Newman of soccer.

The 2008 Male Student Athlete of the Year had the most nominees with

The list included Ji Hoon Heo, Rafael Jones, Kai Staal, Christian Miller, Trevor Ogumoro, Kensuke Kimura, Caleb Arriola, Raphael Zapanta, and Jericho Cruz.

Saipan Swim Club's Abigail Martinsen and Kimball, tracksters Jacque Wonenberg and Lia Rangamar, Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan's Marystar Welch and Angel Marie Tan, tennis' Thea Minor and basketball's Roxanne Duenas were the nominees for the 2008 Female Student Athlete of the Year award.

The Coach of the Year and the inductee to the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame were decided as early as January, but NMASA withheld the announcement of the selection to surprise the winners.

Meanwhile, NMASA president Michael White said the ceremony will start at 7pm and members of the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame and past athletes of the year awardees are welcome to join the event.

"Tonight is an opportunity to celebrate sports in the CNMI, and honored those who have contributed to it," White said.

BRAIG

From Page 28

200m freestyle en route to topping the boys' 9-10 age group competition.

The Saipan International School student earned 490 points from swimming in seven events and defeated seven other participants.

Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan Kaito Yanao placed second with his 485 points, followed by teammates Kosei Toda (230) and Takumi Saugie (220), SSC's Bryce Daly (205), Tsunami's Dylan Ackerman (90), SSC's Andrew Klassen (50), and Ryu Tanzawa (35).

SSC fielded 20 swimmers in the two-day heptathlon meet. The list also included Junior Pamaran, Michael Moran, Keanna Villagomez, Lester Lapuz, Tatiana Calvo, Grace Kimball, Raina Klaver, Andrew Kimball, Justin Park, Matthew Klassen, Abigail Martinsen, Victoria Chentsova, Chenee Rhyoo, Danee Rhyoo, Andrew Klassen, Kento Akimaru, Sarah Klassen, and Emma Martinsen.

Grace Kimball finished first in her age group (girls' 13-14) earning 405 points from seven events, while Abigail Martinsen was second in the girls' 11-12 age group. Moran and Pamaran were fourth and fifth in the boys' 15-and-over, Lapuz was second in the boys' 13-14, Calvo was third in the girls' 13-14, Andrew Kimball was also third in the boys' 11-12, and Chentsova, Klaver, and Rhyoo were third, fourth, and fifth in the girls' 11 to 12.

Coach Villagomez commended his wards for a job well done and hopes the heptathlon meet warms up the club's swimmers for the SSC International Swim Meet set next month.

"There were significant improvements in various events from different swimmers and I hope they will continue to have good swims in the next tournament," Villagomez added.

SHIN

From Page 28

so I will race against myself," Kimura said.

Kimura and Wong are invited to participate in the Japan Open, which will feature medalists and finalists of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2008 FINA World Championships.

The two Tsunami Saipan swimmers will leave Saipan today with coach Hiro Kimura joining them in Tokyo.

Tsunami Saipan was invited to the Japan Open, which will be held at the Tokyo Tatsumi International Swimming Center in Tatsumi, Koto-ku, Tokyo on Feb. 21 and 22, after a notable showing in the 2009 Junior Pan Pacific Swimming Championships in Guam last month.

"I didn't know that I was going to Japan Open when we were still in Guam. But Tsunami Guam head coach, Mr. Iijima, really encouraged me to go to this meet because it will be a great experience," Shin said.

"It's a great chance to compete against some Olympics swimmers, as not everyone gets an opportunity to swim with them," he added.

Heading to his biggest tournament so far, Shin is keeping his feet on the ground.

"There is no chance for me to beat them [unless they get disqualified] because they are Olympic swimmers. But, I can win against myself and get my best time," Shin said.

The 16-year-old swimmer will be competing in the 50m freestyle event, where his best time stands at 28.97 seconds.

"When I go to off-island swim meets and come back to Saipan, people always ask me the same question, 'did you get gold medal?' That's not a bad thing to ask, but in my opinion, getting your best time is what swimming is all about," Shin said.

"During races there are a lot of pain, but when you get out of the water and notice that you made a personal best time or CNMI record, you get this best feeling. Even though you feel like you're about to die after the race, when your time dropped, all that exhaustion from the race goes away," said Shin, who holds the CNMI 15-16 age group record in the 800m freestyle win.

Shin's father and coach, Hiro, said the good things that are happening to his son is proof that the young swimmer has the ability to make waves in the pool.

$51,000

From Page 28

dards for the selection.

Besides Palau and the CNMI, the biennial meet will feature tracksters from the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, and the Marshall Islands.

Sapong said Kiribati and Nauru, which used to compete in the MAC, will now be seeing action in the Melanesian Championships.

"But results will still be included in the MAC for rankings. The OAA Council decided to allow Nauru and Kiribati to participate in the Melanesian Championships, instead of the MAC for cost-cutting purposes and convenience of affected members," Sapong said.

"In the past stagings of MAC, Nauru and Kiribati had a hard time coming to Palau, Saipan, and Guam because of the lack of available flights. Since they [Kiribati and Nauru] are closer to Australia, it will be wise to have them join the Melanesian Championships," Sapong said.

This year's Melanesian Championships will be held in Cairns, Australia.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	44	11	.800	–
Philadelphia	27	25	.519	15 1/2
New Jersey	24	30	.444	19 1/2
New York	22	31	.415	21
Toronto	21	34	.382	23

Southeast Division

Orlando	39	13	.750	–
Atlanta	31	22	.585	8 1/2
Miami	28	24	.538	11
Charlotte	21	32	.396	18 1/2
Washington	12	42	.222	28

Central Division

Cleveland	40	11	.784	–
Detroit	27	25	.519	13 1/2
Milwaukee	27	29	.482	15 1/2
Chicago	23	30	.434	18
Indiana	22	33	.400	20

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

San Antonio	35	17	.673	–
Houston	33	21	.611	3
New Orleans	31	20	.608	3 1/2
Dallas	31	21	.596	4
Memphis	15	38	.283	20 1/2

Northwest Division

Denver	36	17	.679	–
Portland	32	20	.615	3 1/2
Utah	31	23	.574	5 1/2
Minnesota	17	35	.327	18 1/2
Oklahoma City	13	41	.241	23 1/2

Pacific Division

L.A. Lakers	43	10	.811	–
Phoenix	29	23	.558	13 1/2
Golden State	19	35	.352	24 1/2
L.A. Clippers	13	41	.241	30 1/2
Sacramento	11	43	.204	32 1/2

Yesterday's Games

Orlando 107, Charlotte 102, OT
Indiana 100, Philadelphia 91
Washington 111, Minnesota 103
Milwaukee 92, Detroit 86
New York 112, San Antonio 107, OT
New Orleans 100, Oklahoma City 98
Houston 114, New Jersey 88
Utah 117, Memphis 99
Phoenix 140, L.A. Clippers 100
L.A. Lakers 96, Atlanta 83

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two tandems win Marianas Cup tune-up

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

The powerhouse tandems of Tyce Mister and Chris Nelson and Melissa Halaby and Melody Matson went undefeated in their respective divisions en route to winning the Fiesta on the Beach Two-Person Beach Volleyball Tournament held last Sunday at the Fiesta Resort and Spa.

The competition was organized by the Northern Mariana Islands Volleyball Association.

Mister and Nelson outlasted the hardworking pair of Jazz Rosokow and Sydney Takahashi, ending the match with a final score of 25-22 to hoist men's division championship trophy.

In the women's side, Halaby and Matson posted a similar hard-earned 25-22 victory the finals against partners Heather Kennedy and Nicole LeBlanc.

NMIVA reported a successful event, saying it was a big day of fun in the sun at the Fiesta Resort and Spa. The tournament was co-sponsored by SEAFIX and Pacific Trading Co.

NMIVA said that during a recent Marianas Visitors Authority committee meeting, Fiesta Resort and Spa general manager B.K. Park expressed interest in supporting beach volleyball on Saipan.

NMIVA president Laurie Peterka recommended they join forces with Fiesta Resort for the tournament that served as a perfect tune-up for the upcoming Marianas Cup.

However, NMIVA board member Russ Quinn said that they were bothered by the condition of the old beach volleyball court, which was deteriorated and was uninviting to the tourists and so the equipment had to be renovated.

They made a call to Mark Blackburn of SEAFIX and quickly solved the problem.

"SEAFIX, the island's premier industrial and marine machine and fabrication shop, was more than happy to design and fabricate state-of-the-art, FIVB-regulation beach volleyball posts complete with all the required hardware to properly support and tension the net," NMIVA said.

It also said that Fiesta Resort provided a brand new volleyball net—the identical net used on the professional volleyball tour—along with new court-lines. "After much planning, preparation and hard work to set up the tournament and renovate the court, and with drinks provided for by Pacific Trading, the volleyball action got underway last Sunday with two separate men's and women's divisions vying for spectacular prizes offered by Fiesta Resort," NMIVA noted.

During the tournament, Matson and Halaby were undefeated in pool play to earn the top seed, while Kennedy and LeBlanc were seeded second.

Gin Gridley and Lindsey Sosovec settled for the third seed.

In the men's play, nine teams competed with Mister and Nelson sailing thought the competition unscathed—claiming the first seed. Rosokow and Takahashi (second), suffering only one loss to the Mister and Nelson, while teammates Quinn and Bruce Berline grabbed third.

After the pool play, the double elimination playoffs went on with Matson and Halaby holding off the pair of Linda Anastacio and Angie Mister to get into the finals.

Coming up through the losers' bracket, Kennedy and LeBlanc defeated partners Gin Gridley and Lindsey Sosovec in the match for third place and thus joined Matson/Halaby in the finals.

Although it was a hard fought game, the Matson/Halaby tandem proved too much for Kennedy and LeBlanc.

Mister and Nelson continued their rise to the finals by defeating Jess Palacios and Jeff Elliott, then downing Rosokow and Takahashi sending them to the losers' bracket.

The early loss of Quinn and Berline to the losers' bracket where they eventually found themselves in a battle for third place against the duo of Takahashi and Rosokow, who was limping in the match. After a hard fought game, Rosokow/Takahashi earned the right to play a grudge match against Mister and Nelson.

First place winners received a one night's stay at Fiesta Resort & Spa with breakfast for two (each) and $100 cash, while dinner for two and massage gift certificates (each) along with $50 cash for second, while third place took home dinner gift certificates and $30 cash.

Quinn said the tournament exceeded everyone's expectations because the level of play was exceptional and provided them with an inside peek at the quality of competition that awaits them in the Marianas Cup.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Participants of the Fiesta on the Beach Two-Person Beach Volleyball Tournament gather for photo session Sunday at the Fiesta Resort and Spa.

Sablan tops in batting, Camacho is No. 1 pitcher

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

B.J. Sablan of Beach Boys currently leads all batters, while Roque Camacho of Freedom Air is the leader in pitching in the 2008-2009 Budweiser Inter-Government/Business Softball League, according to the latest individual standings released by league statistician Liz Palacios.

Sablan went 26-for-34 at bat for an amazing .765 clip, but Beach Boys are only good for sixth place with nine wins and three losses. He is the only player from his team included in the Top 15 in battling.

As of Feb. 9, Payton Sakuma of Docomo is running second by averaging .737 with his 28 hits in 38 at bats. Docomo is in third place in the overall team standings with its 10-4 win-loss record.

Department of Community and Cultural Affairs remained undefeated after 14 games in the 20-team field and is the team with the most number of players included in the batting leaders spearheaded by pitcher Mel Sakisat.

Sakisat ranks third with his .702 (33-for-47) while teammate Jun Saralu is in eighth place with his .644 (29-for-41). DCCA's Julian Camacho and Joey Dela Cruz are tied in ninth to 10th places with an identical average .636 (28-for-44).

Dela Cruz and Camacho lead the league in home plate-crossings with 28 runs each. Sakisat and Tyrone Omar have 26, while Peter Teigita, Payton Sakuma, and Jerry Ayuyu had 24 each.

Dela Cruz is also the co-leader in homeruns with 11, the same number posted by Byron Kaipat. Julian Camacho has eight, B.J. Sablan and Roy Celis have seven, while Manny Sablan and Reno Celis have six apiece.

Ned Norita of No Zone is fourth in batting with .677 (21-for-31) but his team is in seventh place with a 9-4 card.

Freedom Air's Roy Celis is in fifth spot with .676 (24-38) and the team occupies the fifth position in the team standings at 9-2.

Byron Kaipat of second-ranked Commonwealth Ports Authority averages .658 (25-for-38) to stay in sixth place in batting percentage. He is also leading the RBI department with 36, one ahead of Julian Camacho's 35. Joey Dela Cruz (31), Payton Sakuma (29), Roy Celis, B.J. Sablan, Jerry Ayuyu, and Pete Teigita all have 25 RBIs.

Legislature's Tony Celis is 11th in batting average with his .634 (260-for-41), while Vinnie Sablan of Commonwealth Utilities Corp. is 12th with his .633 (19-for-30), Reno Celis of Freedom Air is 13th with .632 (24-for-38), Jack Diaz of CPA with .630 (17-for-27), and Kyle Kaipat of POI with .621 (18-for-29).

Tony Lizama currently is leading the doubles category with nine, followed by Clifton Sillil and J.J. Laniyo with eight apiece. Jun Saralu has seven, while Pete Teigita, Tony Celis, Byron Kaipat, J.R. Suel, and Roy Celis have six each.

Ben Taisacan is the leader in triples with five, while Pete Teigita and Tyrone Omar have four with eight players getting three each.

Freedom Air's Roque Camacho is leading all pitchers with his 2.51 earned run average. He pitched 39 innings in eight games, giving up 34 runs with 14 errors and allowing 56 hits.

Teammates Pete Towai and Perry Besong are ranked second and third, respectively, with ERAs of 3.71 and 4.22.

Rounding out the Top 10 are Mel Sakisat of DCCA (4.30), Donald Pangelinan of CPA (4.45), Ed Mendiola of CPA (4.67), Frank Shiro of CUC (4.74), John Terlaje of PSS (4.88), Carl Hocog of No Zone (4.97), and Mike Sablan of P&S (5.25).

NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mel Sakisat of league-leading DCCA is currently fourth in earned run average at 4.30, third in batting with an average of .702, and tied for second in run scored with 26.

Rock Steady meets Ford Rangers in 2009 opener

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Defending champion Rock Steady will begin its title retention bid against the Ford Rangers in the inaugural game of the 2009 Budweiser Saipan Major League this Friday, Feb. 20.

Gametime is set at 6:30pm at the Francisco "Tan Ko" M. Palacios Baseball Field.

The game is expected to extend the two teams' rivalry from the 2008 season when they met in the championship with Rock Steady eventually winning the best of five series, 3-2.

Rock Steady will try to repeat its sweep of the 2008 regular season when it won all of its 14 assignments.

Ford Rangers took a 2-1 lead in the finals before Rock Steady wrapped it up by winning the last two games.

Before the resumption of their rivalry this Friday, a simple opening ceremony will be held to introduce the seven participating teams and their sponsors.

The complete list of the teams with their managers in parenthesis are Rock Steady (Mel Tenorio), Ford Rangers (Craig Tenorio), Tanapag Falcons (Manny Evangelista), D-9ers (Chel Castro), Korean Phoenix (Mr. Kim), Masters (Tony Rogolifoi), and Young Guns (Jess Wabol).

The roster of players for the different teams this year was not yet available as of press time yesterday.

The Young Guns, the newest team this year, will be composed of fresh graduates from the Big League of the Saipan Little League.

Games in the 2009 Budweiser SML will be played every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday starting at 6:30pm.

There will be only one game in each playing date.

The second game of the season is set on Feb. 23 and will be between the Tanapag Falcons and D'9ers.

This would be followed by the encounter between the Masters and Korean Phoenix on Wednesday, Feb. 25.

Rock Steady will test the mettle of the Young Guns on Friday, Feb. 27.

Two tandems win Marianas Cup tune-up

The powerhouse tandems of Tyce Mister and Chris Nelson and Melissa Halaby and Melody Matson went undefeated in their respective divisions en route to winning the Fiesta on the Beach Two-Person Beach Volleyball Tournament held last Sunday at the Fiesta Resort and Spa. 27

Saipan Tribune
Sports

Howard scores 45 as Magic beat Bobcats in OT

Dwight Howard had a career-high 45 points, to go with 19 rebounds and eight blocks, leading the Orlando Magic to a 107-102 overtime victory against the Charlotte Bobcats on Tuesday night. 24

Athletes of the Year feted tonight

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

The best performers of 2008 will be announced tonight and will be honored at the NMASA Annual Sports Banquet to be held at Saipan Grand Hotel.

The Northern Marianas Amateur Sports Association will be naming the 2008 Male and Female Athletes of the Year, Male and Female Student Athletes of the Year, and the Coach of the Year.

Also, NMASA will induct a new member to the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame.

NMASA had already made the selection for the various awards during the group's monthly meeting, two weeks ago.

Seven athletes battled for the 2008 Male Athlete of the Year Award.

They were swimming's Rezne Wong, tennis' Ji Hoon Heo, triathlon's Eli Torgeson and Tyce Mister, athletics' Jack Kabiriel, baseball's Nicky San Nicolas, and basketball's Jericho Cruz.

See ATHLETES on Page 26

Braig breaks 29-year record in 50m fly

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Saipan Swim Club's Maxi Braig shattered the oldest record in the boys' 9-10 age group after setting a new mark in the 50m butterfly event during the 2009 SSC Heptathlon Swim Meet held last Feb. 7 at the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool in Marpi.

The 10-year-old Braig timed in at 37.84 seconds in the 50m butterfly swim, eclipsing Jonathan Sakovich's time of 38.45 seconds, which was recorded on Jan. 13, 1980.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
Saipan Swim Club's Maxi Braig in action during the 2009 SSC Heptathlon Swim Meet held last Feb. 7 at the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool in Marpi.

Two more age group records were set in 1980 with Keith Ludwick clocking in at 39.50 seconds in the 50m backstroke (March 28, 1980) and 1:26.08 in the 100m backstroke (Oct. 5, 1980).

"It was an awesome time, a very rewarding result for Maxi, who works hard in our training sessions. It gives him the motivation to do his best in every race," said SSC coach Michael Villagomez.

Besides the 50m fly event, Braig also swam in the 50m and 100m breaststroke, 50m and 100m backstroke, and 50m and

See BRAIG on Page 26

Shin looks forward to Japan Open stint

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

TsunamiSwimming Center Saipan's Shin Kimura shares teammate Rezne Wong's mindset as far as competing in the prestigious 50th Japan Swimming Championships is concerned.

"As Rezne said, we are definitely not at the same level as those who will compete in Japan

See SHIN on Page 26

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
Tsunami Swimming Center Saipan's Shin Kimura will join teammate Rezne Wong in the 50th Japan Swimming Championships.

$51,000 budget proposed for 2009 Micronesian Athletics Championships

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Micronesian representative to the Oceania Athletics Association Council Robin Sapong had already submitted the proposed AU$80,000 [US$51,318.29] budget for the 2009 Micronesian Athletics Championships.

Sapong

The budget submission was made in Nadi, Fiji during the OAA Council meeting, which was attended by IAAF Area Representative to Oceania Bill Bailey, OAA Council president Geoff Gardner of the Norfolk Island, vice president Filimoni Vuli Waqa of Fiji, Australia representative Danny Cocoran, New Zealand representative Trevor Spittle, General Island representative Willie Fong of Samoa and Polynesian representative Titaua Maurin of French Polynesia.

Sapong said the OAA Council is expected to make the final decision about the budget in the next few months.

The Micronesian representative added they were able to secure sponsorship from Adidas for the area championship.

"Adidas will sponsor gear for the participants, just like what it did during the 2008 Oceania Area Championships," Sapong said.

This year's Micronesian Athletics Championships will take place in Koror, Palau on Dec. 11 and 12.

Northern Marianas Athletics president Kurt Barnes announced that the CNMI is hoping to send 20 delegates to the area championships in Palau during the 2008 NMA Awards Banquet last week.

Tryouts will be conducted to select the CNMI representatives and NMA will also release stan-

See $51,000 on Page 26